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Travel mag inside:

Lithuania, ice skating at Eiffel Tower, ski listings



Patch hoopster Griffin overcomes late start on court

Page 53



D.C. financing deal could mean short stay for Expos

Page 24

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THURSDAY, DECEMBER 16, 2004

50¢

Army shifts focus to armor trucks in Iraq

With Humvees being taken care of, other vehicles get attention Page 9

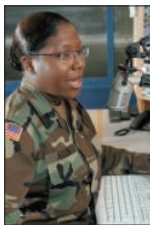


Hanau troops greet 'Band of Brothers' veterans with cheers

Page 3

Col. Tracy Williams, commander of the 104th Area Support Group, talks to Earl McClung, center, and Darrell "Shifty" Powers of "Band of Brothers" fame. McClung, Powers and four other members of Company E, 2nd Battalion, 506th Parachute Infantry Regiment, 101st Airborne Division spoke of their World War II experiences in Hanau, Germany, on Wednesday. This weekend the Band of Brothers veterans will attend ceremonies in Bastogne, Belgium, marking the 60th anniversary of the Battle of the Bulge.

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TODAY IN STRIPES

Abby, Annie's Mailbox.....	42
American Roundup	20-21
Classified	43-45
Comics	40-42
Crossword	41
Faces	37
Horoscope	40
Letters	38
Opinion	39
Sports	46-56
TV listings	36
Weather	35
Your Money	22

News Tracker ... What's new with old news

States

Rapper's death: The death of rapper O.D.B. was deemed an accident by the New York City medical examiner, who said Wednesday that he died from the combined effects of cocaine and a prescription painkiller.

O.D.B., whose legal name was Russell Jones, died at a Manhattan recording studio Nov. 13 "as a result of intoxication" by cocaine and the painkiller Tramadol, said Ellen Borakove, a spokeswoman for the New York City medical examiner's office.

O.D.B., 35, complained of chest pains before collapsing at the studio, and was dead by the time paramedics reached him.

O.D.B., also known as O' Dirty Bastard, was a founding member of the rap group the Wu-Tang Clan.

Michael Jackson investigation: Prosecutors in Michael Jackson's child molestation case want to introduce evidence that the singer has committed other sex crimes over the years that went uncharged.

Prosecutors argue in a motion released Tuesday that the evidence should be admitted under a 1995 California law that lets relevant previous acts, whether prosecuted or not, be considered in sex crime cases.

The motion from the district attorney's office, as well as a defense request for a six-week delay of the scheduled Jan. 31 trial, were released by the court with key sections blacked out and are scheduled for argument in hearings to begin Monday.

Death wish granted: A man who attacked a family killing two children, apparently because he believed the mother had urged his girlfriend to break up with him, was sentenced to death Tuesday in Burlington, Ky., at his own request.

Marco Chapman, 33, pleaded guilty last week to the murders and asked the judge to give him the death penalty.

Cody Sharon, 6, and Chelbi Sharon, 7, were killed to death in 2002. The children's mother, Carolyn Markersberry, who was also attacked, described Chapman as a "monster" during the sentencing.

Baby's severed arms: A McKinney, Texas, mother who admitted killing her baby daughter by severing the girl's arms was guided by a Bible passage in which Jesus refers to cutting off body parts to cast away sin, the woman's attorney said Tuesday.

Dena Schlosser, a 35-year-old housewife who has been shut down since an F-16 fighter accidentally fired at a Little Egg Harbor Township, N.J., intermediate school last month, officials said.

Though training will resume at the Warren Grove Gunnery Range, no weapons will

law enforcement officials said Wednesday. Under terms of the settlement with the Justice Department, prosecution on charges of aiding and abetting securities fraud will be deferred provided that AOL and Time Warner cooperate in an ongoing investigation into whether AOL improperly helped smaller Internet companies artificially inflate their earnings.

An independent monitor will be chosen to oversee AOL's compliance and the company must agree to a number of changes in its internal practices, said a Justice Department official who briefed reporters on condition of anonymity.

Business

Time Warner-AOL fraud settlement: Time Warner Inc. has agreed to pay \$210 million to settle securities fraud charges involving the company's America Online unit,



Emergizing California: Gov. Arnold

Schwarzenegger, left, uses a "hot stick" Tuesday to close the loop that energizes the Path 15 expansion, during ceremonies at the California Independent System Operator in Folsom, Calif. Schwarzenegger was accompanied by Kyle McSlarrow, deputy secretary for the U.S. Department of Energy, at the event that completed the circuit of the 500-kilovolt, 84-mile stretch of power line to help relieve the energy bottleneck between northern and southern California. A \$250 million upgrade added a third transmission line through the critical 84-mile section of the state's power grid.

Under terms of the settlement with the Justice Department, prosecution on charges of aiding and abetting securities fraud will be deferred provided that AOL and Time Warner cooperate in an ongoing investigation into whether AOL improperly helped smaller Internet companies artificially inflate their earnings.

An independent monitor will be chosen to oversee AOL's compliance and the company must agree to a number of changes in its internal practices, said a Justice Department official who briefed reporters on condition of anonymity.

Military

School strafing: Pilots will resume training Thursday at a military range that has been shut down since an F-16 fighter accidentally fired at a Little Egg Harbor Township, N.J., intermediate school last month, officials said.

Though training will resume at the Warren Grove Gunnery Range, no weapons will

be fired for now. Changes have been made to increase safety, Col. Brian Webster said.

"We've implemented a number of new operational procedures and guidelines that allow us to safely resume temporary, limited, non-ordnance training," Webster said in a statement. He commands the 17th Fighter Wing of the New Jersey Air National Guard, which supervises the range.

World

Yushchenko's poisonings: New tests reveal the level of dioxin in the blood of Ukrainian presidential candidate Viktor Yushchenko is more than 6,000 times higher than normal, according to the expert analyzing the samples.

The concentration, about 100,000 units per gram of blood fat, is the second highest ever recorded, said Abraham Brouwer, professor of environmental toxicology at the Free University in Amsterdam, where blood samples taken last weekend in Vienna were sent for analysis.

Almost everyone has some level of dioxins because the toxic chemical is widespread in the environment — mainly from its industrial uses.

In the case of Yushchenko, Brouwer's team has narrowed the search from more than 400 dioxins to about 29 and is confident they will identify the poison by week's end. That, in turn, could provide clues for the investigation of the alleged poisoning.

Afghan attack: Provincial forces who came under attack called in coalition artillery support that killed seven insurgents in southeastern Afghanistan, a U.S. official said Wednesday.

The clash occurred Monday night in Khost province, and no coalition or provincial forces were wounded, U.S. Maj. Mark McCann told a regular media briefing.

Indian train collision: Railway officials say a train collision in northern India that killed at least 37 people apparently was caused by a communications lapse between stations, and that the two stationmasters face criminal charges in the disaster.

An express passenger train and a local train collided head-on Tuesday in a rural stretch of northern Punjab state, killing both drivers plus 35 other people aboard the trains. Rescuers had recovered all bodies by Wednesday and the tracks were cleared for traffic to resume, Siddiqui said.

War on terrorism

Request for clemency: U.S. Sen. Mike DeWine asked the Army to grant clemency to two Ohio soldiers imprisoned for taking Army vehicles abandoned in Kuwait by other units so they could carry out their own unit's mission to Iraq.

In a letter to Lt. Gen. Thomas Metz, commander of the multinational force in Iraq, DeWine asked that the punishment for Darrell Birt, of Columbus, and Maj. Cathy Kaus be reduced to time served.

Birt, Kaus and four other members of the 65th Transportation Company based in Springfield, Ohio, were court-martialed and charged with theft, destruction of Army property and conspiracy to cover up their crimes.

Stories and photo from wire services

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Correction

A story in Tuesday's editions on a new film, "Gunner Palace," incorrectly identified 1st Lt. Ben Colgan, who was killed in November 2003 while fighting in Iraq.

Horoscopes and advice
every day in Stars and Stripes



Earl McClung



Buck Compton



William "Wild Bill" Guarnere



Darrell "Shifty" Powers



Don Malarky

'Brothers' pay Hanau troops a visit

BY KEVIN DOUGHERTY

Stars and Stripes

HANAU, Germany — A buzz of anticipation ruffled through the crowded gymnasium. In a few minutes, a Band of Brothers six-pack would pop in for a brief visit before heading off for a historic reunion in Bastogne, Belgium.

Darrell "Shifty" Powers looked not the least bit fazed by it all. While his compatriots were off preparing for the grand entrance, Powers stood outside chatting with a few troops and having a last-minute smoke.

Some of the talk centered on the veterans' missing luggage. Heavy fog had delayed their flight into Frankfurt on Tuesday, and when it arrived nearly all of their bags had been left behind in Paris. The 127th Aviation Support Battalion, which hosted Wednesday's visit to Hanau, Germany, stepped up to meet their needs until the lost luggage arrived.

"It's no problem," Powers repeatedly assured the young GIs. That's typical talk for a member of Easy Company, 506th Parachute Infantry Regiment, 101st Airborne Division. War has a way of putting things in proper perspective.

Thursday marks the 60th anniversary of the Battle of the Bulge, Adolf Hitler's last major offensive of World War II. This weekend in Bastogne, scores of veterans will attend commemorative ceremonies marking the occasion.

Among those on hand will be the six veterans of Easy Company, immortalized in Stephen Am-



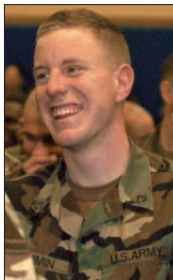
Edward "Babe" Heffron

brose's best-selling book "Band of Brothers."

At the invitation of the 127th ASB, based at Fliegerhorst Casern in Hanau, the veterans paid the soldiers a visit that had been months in the making.

It seems that several members of the unit had been in frequent contact with Easy Company vets during their tour in Iraq. In fact, Earl McClung was on the phone with Sgt. 1st Class Billy Maloney one day when Maloney's camp came under fire. McClung stayed on the line during the whole episode.

"I think they are happier to meet us than we are to meet them," Staff Sgt. Scott Fussell of Alpha Company said after Powers walked away to join his compatriots inside.



It was hard to tell. When the six walked into the gymnasium, the place erupted in applause, and continued as the veterans, now in their early 80s, walked through the crowd toward the stage.

"I'd rather be here than back home," William "Wild Bill" Guarnere said to the gym full of GIs. Buck Compton referred to the 1st Armored Division as "a noble unit" that today faces a foe that is "far and away a greater threat [to world peace] than the enemy we fought."

"Your country is for you and proud of you and don't you ever forget it," Compton said, eliciting hearty cheers.

Joining Compton, Guarnere,

Powers and McClung on stage were Edward Heffron and Don Malarky.

The hour flew by. After brief statements by each of the veterans, the audience members got their chance to ask several questions, which sometimes spanned a side tale or two.

When someone asked Guarnere about the German motorcycle he commandeered, he hesitated for a moment.

"Which motorcycle?" Guarnere inquired as the crowd began to laugh. "Normandy or Holland? There were two motorcycles."

Malarky chimed in that on joyrides, he "rode in the side car like a general ... and nobody ever stopped us."

And on and on it went. There were stories and plenty of tributes to today's frontline soldier.

"You are what we were 60 years ago," McClung said.

Deborah Harris asked the veterans for some hometown advice. She said her son, Capt. Eugene Fewell, is on his second tour in Iraq and wondered what tone is the best to strike in her letters from home.

Heffron fielded the question, noting that he and three of his brothers fought in WWII. When they heard of problems back home, they worried a lot.

"Don't give him any bad news," Heffron said. "He's got his own problems."

E-mail Kevin Dougherty at: doughertyk@mail.stripses.ods.mil

Soldiers laugh as William "Wild Bill" Guarnere of "Band of Brothers" fame talks about the "hanky-panky" in London during World War II. The former troops made an appearance in Hanau, Germany, on Wednesday, while on their way to Battle of the Bulge observances.

PHOTOS BY MICHAEL ABRAMS Stars and Stripes



PETER JAEGER/Stars and Stripes

The Army veterans in the Band of Brothers will join actor Tom Hanks and others at the 60th anniversary observance of the Battle of the Bulge in Bastogne, Belgium, this week.

Highlights of those events include:

■ **Thursday** — A vigil beginning at 5 p.m. to commemorate the beginning of the battle between German and Allied forces in the Ardennes region, fighting that became known as the Battle of the Bulge. Ceremonies of remembrance will take place at various monuments and sites in Belgium and Luxembourg, including the American Military Cemetery in Hamm, east of Luxembourg City, where more than 5,000 Americans killed during World War II are buried. A ceremony with U.S.

and international officials at Hamm will start at 3 p.m.

■ **Saturday** — Commemoration of the siege of Bastogne, with a historic walk along the Bastogne defensive perimeter. Three self-paced walks — six, 12 and 20 kilometers — will begin from the town square. The walks officially begin at 8 a.m., but walkers can start up to 9:30 a.m. Cost is 3 euros, and walkers can register at the Europa tavern on the town square between 7 a.m. and 9:30 a.m.

Also scheduled is the annual Nuts Fair, once a celebration for farm workers and animal tenders looking to spend the year's wages while also seeking work for the new year. Those who were hired purchasing cakes and nuts to give as gifts. The fair's

name also ties in with Brig. Gen. Anthony C. McAuliffe's famous reply when asked by the Germans to surrender, and the event is now a big party for war re-enactors and others. A sound-and-light re-enactment begins at 5:30 p.m.

■ **Sunday** — Religious ceremony beginning at 10 a.m. honoring war dead at Noville, near Bastogne, and a parade of military vehicles in the afternoon in Bastogne.

■ **Dec. 24** — 60th anniversary midnight Mass at Saint-Pierre Church in Bastogne beginning at 11:30 p.m.

Other events continue through June. For a list and additional information, check the Web site

www.bastogne.be/60eme/eng/home_eng.htm

For more about the Battle of the Bulge from the Stars and Stripes archives, go to www.stripses.com/bulge



Left: Lt. Cmdr. Mark Flynn, a family practice doctor stationed at Naval Hospital Rota, Spain, works with a translator to help a Beninese patient in Benin, Africa, this month. Seven military personnel from Rota and Stuttgart, Germany, participated in the French-led Recamp IV exercise in West Africa. Flynn said there was a widespread belief among the Beninese that the doctors could "work magic for them."

Below: Navy Petty Officer 2nd Class Glenn Davis, a corpsman stationed at Rota, treats a Beninese patient.

LEFT: GLENN DAVIS/Courtesy of the U.S. Navy
BELOW: Courtesy of the U.S. Navy



Making 'magic' in Benin

Military medical team holds clinic in impoverished nation

BY SCOTT SCHONAUER

Stars and Stripes

NAVAL STATION ROTA, Spain — Word traveled fast through southern Benin that military doctors were offering free medical care.

Patients in the impoverished West African nation lined up and waited for hours in the broiling 90-degree temperatures and stifling humidity.

Some residents walked more than a dozen miles to see the group of Belgian, American and Beninese military doctors.

Lt. Cmdr. Mark Flynn, the head family practice doctor at the U.S. Navy hospital in Rota, Spain, said there was a wide-

spread belief the doctors could "work magic for them."

"It was not uncommon for us to talk to people who walked 30 kilometers to come see us," Flynn said. "And they would turn around and walk 30 kilometers back at the end of the day. And that was just so they could see if we could help them with whatever it might be."

Seven American military medical personnel from Rota and Stuttgart, Germany, participated in the French-led exercise in Benin, a former French colony between Togo and Nigeria that borders the Bight of Benin. The peacekeeping and humanitarian aid drill, which ended last weekend, aimed to bring West African soldiers to-

gether with their Western counterparts to learn what to do if a crisis erupted in the troubled region. About 3,000 troops from various nations took part.

For American servicemen, it was an opportunity to provide medical care to those who needed it and to make friends in a region racked by instability and violence.

Few people in the impoverished nation, where an Army captain makes \$30 a month, have access to decent medical care.

The medical clinic set up about four miles from the city of Ouidah on the southern coast served as a small part of the exercise, but the team treated hundreds of patients. In the eight days the clinic was open, the team treated 1,340 people, or about 167 people a day.

Malaria was the biggest problem among patients. But a bigger obstacle at times was overcoming stereotypes and Beninese children's fear of those with white skin. Many of them had never seen white people.

Flynn learned about 30 words of the tribal language and tried to ease the apprehension among patients, especially the children.

The medicine was almost secondary in a lot of cases to be able to get them to understand that we're not any different than they are in most respects," he said. "So to be able to connect with them was a pretty important thing."

Although the team helped hundreds of residents, the clinic helped only a small portion of the country, where the life expectancy is only 50 years old for men and 51 years old for women. The clinic was limited in the care it could provide.

"It was a very rewarding experience," said Petty Officer 2nd Class Glenn Davis, a corpsman stationed in Rota. "In some respects it was sad, we weren't able to heal anyone, we were only able to help."

E-mail Scott Schonauer at: schonauers@mail.strips.osd.mil

U.S., other nations agree to coordinate Africa efforts

BY CHARLIE COON

Stars and Stripes

STUTTGART, Germany — Many military are giving aid to Africa. France and Italy are training new police officers. Germany might send cargo planes to help ferry troops and supplies into Sudan. Spain is planning exercises with Morocco.

There are dozens of more examples. But the programs and exercises are like pieces from a 500-piece jigsaw puzzle, according to Army Col. Mark Morrison: important by themselves, but more useful after being put together. That was the goal of the second Africa Clearinghouse.

"We saw a need that we could work together," said Morrison, chief of the Africa Division, Plans and Policies Directorate at the U.S. European Command. "To maximize resources, share information, make sure we're not duplicating efforts, and not wasting our resources and time."

Representatives from European countries, Canada and the U.S. State Department concluded two days of talks Tuesday at EUCOM headquarters. They promised to create a database — similar to a master calendar — of their African activities.

About Africa

Size: 11.7 million square miles or nearly four times the size of the continental United States
 Nations: 54

Resources: Africa is a major exporter of oil to the United States — Nigeria is the fifth-largest U.S. source. The African continent also has among the world's largest reserves of gold, platinum and cobalt and is famed for its diamond mines.

Problems: The continent is plagued by HIV, the virus that causes AIDS, and by diseases such as cholera. The continent has also been ravaged for centuries by civil wars, such as the current one in Sudan and last year's conflict in Liberia. Natural disasters such as locusts and famine also plague its people.

Source: U.S. European Command, various Web sites

They also agreed to meet again in six months to plan ways to coordinate their efforts toward Africa, a huge and strategically important continent.

The first Africa Clearinghouse took place in May in Luxembourg. About 25 people attended this week's conference; the next could be held in Britain in May or June.

"It was a really good forum for exchanging information," said Lt. Col. Timo Haebe of the European Union's Operations and Exercises Division. "Now we have names and faces, and know who to call."

"You can save time, save your workload and even money and resources," he said.

The U.S. military has conducted many operations in Africa over the past year.

Army Special Forces soldiers and Marines spent the summer training security forces in the interior nations of Chad and Niger. The Air Force recently airlifted African Union troops and supplies into the Darfur region of Sudan.

And troops based from all service branches based at Camp Lemonnier in Djibouti, on the eastern Horn of Africa, patrol the Red Sea and perform humanitarian missions.

"It's important to our U.S. strategic interests that we look at Africa," said C.D. Smith, from the U.S. Defense Department's Africa Center for Strategic Studies, after Tuesday's meeting. "It's important to our historical connections with Africa."

"It's also important as we fight the global war on terrorism, because we don't want Africa to become another growing ground or recruiting area for terrorists that we've seen in other parts of the world."

Morrison, the EUCOM colonel, noted that Africa has an abundance of both resources and problems.

The AIDS epidemic, for example, threatens to kill off entire generations of young adults in parts of the continent, thereby threatening the well-being of the generation of children that follows.

If aid projects are better coordinated, Morrison said, perhaps Africans will sooner be able to address for themselves their medical and security emergencies.

"(The United States and other countries) don't always want to be the ones to have to go in and respond to crises in the regions," he said. "We want them to be able to do it by themselves, or with minimal or reduced input from the rest of the world."

E-mail Charlie Coon at: coon@mail.strips.osd.mil

Time for holiday songs and good cheer



PHOTOS BY TERRY BOYD/Stars and Stripes

"You'd better not pout, you'd better not cry" were the marching orders Tuesday at H.D. Smith Barracks in Baumholder, Germany, as 30 carolers from Smith Elementary School made the rounds. The children visited to two units, the base dental clinic and the 2nd Brigade dining facility and headquarters. It was the second day the second-grade classes ventured around the base singing Christmas, Hanukkah and other winter holiday songs, said teachers Karen Jones and Jill Albaugh.

Officials: Tests keep HIV rates low for GIs

The Associated Press

SAN ANTONIO — Intensive screening for illicit drug use and the virus that causes AIDS is keeping HIV rates low among American troops, but health workers say the disease is threatening political stability in other countries.

Rates of HIV infection in the military forces of some sub-Saharan nations in Africa are two to four times higher than in the general population, a Centers for Disease Control and Prevention official said Tuesday.

Military leaders from two dozen African and South American nations are meeting with their American counterparts this week to discuss plans for managing and halting the AIDS pandemic.

The five-day conference continues through Friday at a San Antonio hotel. It is hosted by the Defense Institute for Medical Operations, based at Brooks City-Base.

In the United States, Air Force personnel are tested for HIV every two years, receiving special briefings on HIV and AIDS before they are deployed overseas, said Col. Matthew J. Dolan, chief of medical operations at the hosting institute.

He said mandatory drug tests discourage use of intravenous drugs, which put people at risk for HIV transmission. The Air Force diagnoses 35 to 45 new HIV infections annually.

"That is low, but we'd like it to be zero," Dolan said.

But Keith Sabin, a CDC epidemiologist, said that half of the military personnel in some countries carry the virus that causes AIDS and many leaders have pointed out the potential dangers.

"They said, 'We are very concerned. There will not be sufficient numbers of men to serve in the uniformed services because they will all be sick and dying and these are the institutions that maintain a lawful and civil society,'" Sabin said.

Maj. Robert McConnell, director of infection control at Wilford Hall Medical Center, said several nations attending have adopted slogans that stress HIV prevention among the troops.

"This is really at the forefront of their consciousness in maintaining a strong military and a stable country," McConnell said.

Dolan said international representatives can talk about "best practices" at the conference and share ideas about what has worked. He said that military personnel typically acquire HIV through heterosexual contact with prostitutes.

"There are things in the military that are unique pressures," Dolan said. "It is a sexually active age and they are away from their homes and families and their regular partners, and they are taught to be bold and to take risks. We try to look at these pressures and how can we deal with them."



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Air Force tanker to leave France

An Air Force tanker unit will bid adieu to France on Friday. The formal ceremony marks the end of 10 years of partnership with the French to provide air refueling for NATO operations in the Balkans and elsewhere from an air base in Istres.

The U.S. tankers are no longer needed, an Air Force press release said. The NATO alliance recently turned over primary peacekeeping duties in Bosnia and Herzegovina to the European Union. Col. Joseph Abbott, commander of the 401st Air Expeditionary Wing based at Aviano Air Base, Italy, will host the ceremony.

New Mildenhall skipper assumes command

MILDENHALL, England — Naval Air Facility Mildenhall has a new skipper.

Cmdr. Patrick O'Shea assumed command Dec. 2 from Cmdr. Kenan Shaffer, who leaves the post for the U.S. Naval Element National Reconnaissance Office in Virginia, according to a news release. O'Shea served as Shaffer's executive officer.

"I expect you to continue with the same level of dedication and professionalism — remember, take care of the fleet, and I will take care of you," O'Shea said during the change of command ceremony, according to the release.

In his final address to sailors, Shaffer urged flexibility, focus and teamwork.

"We cannot afford to lose focus of the overall mission," Shaffer said. "It's easy to get distracted, but we must rely on each other to refocus after each distraction."

Aircraft, crews replaced at Sigonella

A detachment of P-3C Orion aircraft and crews from Patrol Squadron Five recently replaced aircraft and personnel from Patrol Squadron 16 at Naval Air Station Sigonella, Sicily.

Both squadrons are based out of Naval Air Station Jacksonville, Fla. The VP-5 "Max Foxes" sent aircraft and about 150 personnel to Sigonella. They are expected to be there for about six months.

VP-16 spent five months flying missions from Sigonella. Squadron aircraft also deployed to Bahrain and Comalapa, El Salvador, and flew missions in support of U.S. forces in Afghanistan.

From staff reports

Navy investigated alleged war crimes

BY PAISLEY DODDS

The Associated Press

SAN JUAN, Puerto Rico — Newly released U.S. Navy documents portray a series of abuse cases stretching beyond Iraq's Abu Ghraib prison where photos surfaced this year of U.S. troops forcing prisoners — often naked — to pose in humiliating positions.

The files released Tuesday document a crush of abuse allegations, most from the early months of the U.S. occupation of Iraq, including U.S. Marines forcing Iraqi juveniles to kneel while troops discharge a weapon in a mock execution and the use of an electric shock on a prisoner.

The approximately 10,000 files include investigation reports from the Naval Criminal Investigative Service and witness interviews.

All names have been blacked out in the documents, which were released after a federal court ordered the government to comply with a Freedom of Information Act petition filed by the American Civil Liberties Union, the Center for Constitutional Rights and other organizations.

"This kind of widespread abuse could not have taken place without a leadership failure of the highest order," said ACLU Executive Director Anthony D. Romero.

The Pentagon says cases of abuse are taken seriously and investigated.

Documents reveal early accounts of Marines mistreating prisoners

"The fact that these cases have been investigated underscores the point that we've been making, which is when we have credible allegations of abuse we take them seriously and investigate them," said Maj. Michael Shavers, a Pentagon spokesman.

Some of the documents include the alleged executions of Iraqis.

The Navy found the allegations to be "unsubstantiated" and closed the investigation. It remains unclear whether any other military branches are investigating.

In one of the reports, a Marine said he and two others were ordered to kill three Iraqis.

"The executions allegedly took place in early April 2003 while the unit was temporarily based at an abandoned Iraqi pharmaceutical factory south of Baghdad," according to the NCIS document, dated June 26, 2003.

The Marine said he was threatened with death if he did not carry out the order. The bodies of the dead Iraqis allegedly were dumped in a hole, the document said.

After the incident was reported, the Marines were interviewed.

One, who was interviewed and advised of his rights, retracted his previous statements, saying the executions never took place.

He said he "made up the story to tell his friends ... unlike his colleagues, he didn't have good stories to tell about his deployment to Iraq," the report said. It added that the Marine said he was drunk and made up the story while at a party.

The suspect, whose name along with others allegedly involved was blacked out, was given a polygraph test, "an evaluation of the examination indicated [he] was being truthful in his responses."

Troops have said many of them are trained in ways to trick polygraph examiners. It was unclear whether the Marine was disciplined for the alleged fabrication.

At least 19 prisoner deaths in Iraq and Afghanistan have been investigated by the military; eight were determined to be justified killings of an escaping or dangerously violent prisoner.

Several Marines have been charged in connection with the treatment of a member of Saddam Hussein's Baath Party who

died of strangulation after a Marine grabbed him by the neck at a holding facility. Investigators ruled that the death was accidental, but other investigations are pending.

In another of the documents, a Navy corpsman is quoted as saying, "there was a lot of peer pressure to keep one's mouth shut."

In yet another, a Navy investigator describes his Iraq case as an "exploding" with "high visibility cases."

One case occurred on April 13 in al-Mahmudiya, Iraq, where a witness — whose name has been blacked out — saw a Marine "shock an Iraqi detainee with an electric transformer," holding "wires against the shoulder area of the detainee [who] danced as he was shocked."

Five suspects were involved in the case, according to the document. One of them was found guilty of assault, cruelty and maltreatment, among other charges, and was sentenced to a year in the brig. A second suspect was found guilty of cruelty and maltreatment, and was sentenced to eight months.

The cases of the three others in the case are pending, according to the documents.

In a case from June 2003, Marines in Adwanah ordered "four juvenile Iraqi looters to kneel beside a shallow fighting hole and a pistol was discharged to conduct a mock execution."

It was unclear from the redacted documents whether anyone was disciplined.

Bomb kills 7 at Karbala Shiite shrine

Allawi announces plans to run for elected office

BY PAUL GARFODD

The Associated Press

BAGHDAD — A bomb exploded at the gate of a revered Shiite shrine Wednesday, killing seven people in an apparent attempt to kill an aide to Iraq's top Shiite cleric and casting the shadow of violence over the first day of campaigning in the country's crucial January elections.

The attack in Karbala, which wounded the representative of Grand Ayatollah Ali al-Sistani, came hours after the campaign kicked off with Iraqi interim Prime Minister Ayad Allawi announcing his candidacy. Allawi's defense minister accused Iranian and Syrian intelligence agents of helping insurgents in Iraq.

Also on Wednesday, a Western official in Baghdad said Saddam's notorious right-hand man, Ali Hassan al-Majid, known as "Chemical Ali," would be among the first to appear in court next week to face charges for crimes allegedly committed during Saddam's 35-year dictatorship. Allawi said earlier that formal indictments could be issued against some of Saddam's top deputies next month — just ahead of the Jan. 30 elections.

Ali Hassan al-Majid, who was No. 2 on the coalition's list of most-wanted playing cards, is accused of ordering the 1988 Halabja chemical weapons attack against Kurds, the 1990 invasion of Kuwait and suppressing a 1991 Shiite uprising in southern Iraq.

He is against 12 regime members, including Saddam who was arrested a year ago Monday, waiting to face trial. But the former Iraqi president will not be among those to appear in court next week. The Associated Press has learned.

The blast south of Baghdad underlined worries over security during the campaign and the election,



Iraqi National Guards secure the area during interim Prime Minister Ayad Allawi's press conference in Baghdad on Wednesday. Allawi announced that he joined the race for Iraq's Jan. 30 elections.

with insurgents expected to attempt to derail the vote creating a national assembly.

While Iraq's Shiite Muslim majority has welcomed an election it likely will dominate, Sunni Arabs have expressed fears they will be eclipsed and some have called for a boycott of the vote. Ali al-Sistani has backed a coalition of major Shiite political parties that has put forward a list of candidates and is expected to do well in the first national election since Saddam's fall.

Sunni militants have been accused in past attacks against Shiites and their holy sites. There was no immediate claim of responsibility for Wednesday's bombing.

The blast went off at the western gate of the Imam Hussein Shrine in Karbala, killing seven people and wounding 31, said Dr. Abdul-Abbas Al-Tinimi, director of Al-Hussein hospital.

Al-Sistani's representative, Sheikh Abdul Mahdi al-Karbalaee, was among the wounded, and an al-Sistani spokesman said al-Karbalaee was the intended target of the blast. Several of his bodyguards were among the dead and wounded, the spokesman — Hamed al-Khafaf — told Al-Jazeera television.

U.S. deaths in Iraq

The Associated Press

As of Tuesday, at least 1,301 members of the U.S. military have died since the beginning of the Iraq war in March 2003, according to an Associated Press count. At least 1,019 died as a result of hostile action, the Defense Department said. The figures include three military civilians.

The AP count is five higher than the Defense Department's tally, last updated at 10 a.m. EST Tuesday.

The British military has reported 74 deaths; Italy, 19; Poland, 13; Spain, 11; Ukraine, nine; Bulgaria, seven; Slovakia, three; Estonia, Thailand and the Netherlands, two each; and Denmark, El Salvador, Hungary and Latvia one death each.

Since May 1, 2003, when President Bush declared that major combat operations in Iraq had ended, 1,163 U.S. military members have died, according to AP's count. That includes at least 910 deaths resulting from hostile action, according to the military's numbers.

The latest deaths reported by the military:

■ Two Marines were killed Monday in Anbar province, Iraq.

The latest identifications reported by the military:

■ Marine Lance Cpl. Gregory P. Rund, 21, Littleton, Colo., killed Saturday in hostile action in Anbar province, Iraq, assigned to the 3rd Battalion, 5th

Marine Regiment, 1st Marine Division, 1 Marine Expeditionary Force, Marine Corps Base Camp Pendleton, Calif.

■ Army Cpl. Joshua A. Ramsey, 19, Defiance, Ohio, died Sunday of non-combat injuries in Baghdad; assigned to the 95th Military Police Battalion, Mannheim, Germany.

■ Marine Lance Cpl. Jeffrey S. Blanton, 23, Fayetteville, Ga.; killed Sunday in hostile action in Anbar province, Iraq, assigned to the 1st Battalion, 3rd Marine Regiment, 3rd Marine Division, III Marine Expeditionary Force, Marine Corps Base, Hawaii.

■ Marine Staff Sgt. Melvin L. Blazer, 38, Moore, Okla.; Marine Cpl. Jason S. Marday, 21, Camp Fulton, Ala.; Marine Staff Sgt. Jeffrey L. Kirk, 24, Baton Rouge, La.; Marine Lance Cpl. Hilario F. Lopez, 22, Inglede, Texas; and Marine Cpl. Ian W. Stewart, 21, Lake Hughes, Calif.

All killed Sunday in hostile action in Anbar province, Iraq, assigned to the 3rd Battalion, 5th Marine Regiment, 1st Marine Division, I Marine Expeditionary Force, Marine Corps Base, Camp Pendleton, Calif.

■ Marine Pfc. Brent T. Vroman, 21, Oskosh, Wis., and Marine Lance Cpl. Richard D. Warner, 22, Waukegan, Ill., killed Monday in hostile action in Babil province, Iraq; assigned to the Marine Corps Reserve's 2nd Battalion, 24th Marine Regiment, 8th Marine Division, Chicago, Ill.

New system tracks status of wounded troops

BY BEN MURRAY

Stars and Stripes

LANDSTUHL, Germany — Commanders and medical personnel worldwide will soon be able to check the status of patients from Iraq and Afghanistan with little more than a few computer keystrokes.

A new online tool called the Joint Patient Tracking Application allows users "from theater to White House" to get real-time updates on the status of sick and injured troops as they move through the medical system, said Col. Richard Jordan, deputy commander for outlying clinics at Landstuhl Regional Medical Center in Germany.

For sick or wounded troops, the new system means shorter waits for appointments and a smoother transition in and out of medical facilities, Jordan said. Before they even get to the hospital, staff will know

where patients will need a bed, how long they'll stay and even whether they'll need a new uniform when they arrive.

Landstuhl computer experts developed the tracking system to streamline the overburdened Deployed Warrior Medical Management Center, which tracks wounded patients from downrange entering and leaving the Army hospital. The Department of Defense adopted the \$350,000 system military-wide on Nov. 29.

The JPTA updates the hospital's antiquated tracking system, which bowed under the pressure of thousands of new patients from the Middle East and Southwest Asia.

Since Operation Iraqi Freedom started in March last year, Landstuhl doctors have treated 18,214 ill and injured troops from Iraq and 3,130 from Afghanistan, a hospital spokeswoman said.

Already in use by some facilities in Kuwait, the JPTA has proved useful to commanders downrange, according to the program's architect and Landstuhl's chief of information management, Lt. Col. Mike Fravell.

Fravell told the story of a Special Forces commander stationed in Balad, Iraq, who wanted to know if an injured member of his task force would be returning to the unit. He asked the JPTA to find out.

"Within seconds they were able to see where he is, what month he's in and what the extent of his injuries are," Fravell said.

Previously, that kind of search could have taken days or been impossible because patients were being transferred between different facilities and locations, each with its own tracking and processing systems, he said.

Since the war, Landstuhl has moved am-

bulatory patients to area gyms and barracks to ease overcrowding at the hospital. As of this week, more than 100 patients were staying outside of the hospital.

That had made it nearly impossible to keep up updated records on all the troops, Jordan said.

The hospital exhibited a "marked deficiency in our ability to see what was going on with the patients and manage them once they got here," Jordan said. And, the medical management center was able to respond to only about 1 percent of the patient inquiries it received.

"We needed a Web-based application to streamline the business process," Fravell said.

The JPTA is being installed in frontline medical facilities in Iraq and Afghanistan now. Major military medical centers in the States get it next.

Email Ben Murray at: MurrayB@starsandstripes.osd.mil

Celebrities to send off 155th BCT

JACKSON, Miss. — Singer Wayne Newton, actor Gary Sinise and other celebrities will entertain the 155th Brigade Combat Team at Camp Shelby next week before the soldiers ship out for Iraq.

The team is made up of about 4,000 soldiers from Mississippi, Arkansas and Vermont.

Military leaders and USO officials have planned a concert for Dec. 21.

The soldiers will be given leave after the ceremony and spend Christmas with their families before leaving for Iraq in January.

"I know the soldiers are really looking forward to seeing their family and friends before they leave, and we want to send them off with a really good send-off," Camp Shelby spokesman Maj. Dorli Sanders said.

From The Associated Press

U.S. Navy pressured to limit ocean sonar use

San Francisco Chronicle

The United States is facing increasing international pressure to place limitations on the use of military sonar, the underwater equivalent of radar that has been linked to mass strandings of whales.

The European Union Parliament — the most prominent of four international bodies that have taken up the matter in recent months — called in October for its member states to develop a moratorium on all types of military sonars, which use powerful sound to locate objects such as submarines.

Two weeks ago, the IUCN-World Conservation Union, a prestigious group of 70 nations and 400 nongovernmental

organizations meeting in Bangkok, overwhelmingly passed a resolution urging governments to limit the use of loud noise sources in the world's oceans, including military sonar. The United States abstained from the vote.

The measure also said that sonar and other activities should be avoided entirely in areas where the vulnerable species live.

The U.S. Navy is the biggest user of mid-frequency active sonar in the world — and government officials have been loath to require permits to regulate its use. "We're not ignoring it by any means," said Bill Hogarth, director of the fisheries division of the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration. "But to translate to direct mortality is very difficult."

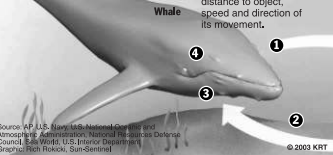
Whales need hearing for survival

Dolphins and whales use their keen hearing and a behavior called echolocation to find mates, search for food and avoid predators in deep or murky water.

Sonar's impact on whales

In March 2000, 16 whales and a dolphin washed up on Bahamas beaches after a Navy sonar exercise; seven of the mammals died. Sound waves, possibly from the sonar, had caused injuries around the whales' eyes and ears.

Sound travels as much as five times faster underwater than in the air.



Source: U.S. Navy, U.S. National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, National Science Foundation, Council, SeaWorld, U.S. Interior Department, Graphics: Bob Truitt, San Francisco

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Snow brings stars, smiles to troops in Iraq

BY RON JENSEN
Stars and Stripes

LOGISTICS SUPPORT AREA ANACONDA, Iraq — Troops around Iraq got a chance to see it all on Tuesday: Comedy, football and even a good-looking woman.

"Good evening, Balad," comedian Robin Williams yelled to more than 3,000 troops at Balad Air Base, a reprise of his "Good Morning, Vietnam" movie role.

Then Williams was off and running on a stream of consciousness riff that was sometimes obscene, but other times merely profane.

The troops cheered every "I bomb, every indecent innuendo and every naughty gesture from the wound-up comic/actor."

They cheered, too, when he spoke of things about which they are familiar, like the C-130 Hercules that brought the show to Anaconda from Baghdad. A good airplane for the deaf, he called it.

"I like when the crew puts on Kevlar and says, 'It's perfectly safe, Mr. Williams,'" he said.

Williams was the star, but he was not the only entertainer. Model Lesann Tweeden, former NFL quarterback John Elway and comedian and actor Blake Clark were on the bill as well. Accompanying them was Gen. Richard Myers, chairman of the joint chiefs of staff. The group is visiting several locations overseas.

Tweeden, who has visited Iraq twice before on USO tours, acted as emcee for the show. Because of the chilly night air, she was bundled in a heavy coat, to the disappointment of many GIs.

"If I like my coat off, I'll freeze," she said to a crowd that cared little about her comfort.

She thanked the troops for their service before introducing Elway, the Hall of Fame signal caller for the Denver Broncos.



RON JENSEN/Stars and Stripes

Comedian and actor Robin Williams poses with troops at LSA Anaconda, Iraq, after his show Tuesday for the USO. Many troops were able to pose for photos that were placed on the base Web site for downloading.

Elway said he was surprised to get an invitation for the tour. He couldn't sing or dance and wasn't much to look at, he said he told the man on the phone asking him visit American troops.

"He said, 'How's your arm?'"

Elway recalled. "I said, 'I can still chuck it,' so look out, guys."

With that, the arm that won two Super Bowls tossed a few dozen footballs into the crowd, even reaching those in the high seats at the outdoor stadium.

"You make me proud to be an American," said Elway. "What you guys do makes what I've done nothing."

Clark, known for roles in movies such as "The Waterboy" and

"The Ladykillers" and the "Home Improvement" television show, led an infantry platoon in Vietnam.

Looking at the lineup of dignitaries that accompanied the show, he said, "Last time I was around this many generals, they made us invade Laos."

His jokes were heavy on satirizing the southern roots. He was born in Georgia and said he had flashbacks while still in Vietnam.

Clark said he has a lot in common with President Clinton.

"We're both from the South. We have the same initials," he said. "But unlike him, I went to Vietnam, and I did inhale."

Before leaving the stage for the headline, Clark turned serious. Speaking as a combat veteran, he said, "Take it from me, years from now... you'll remember this. You didn't read about it in a book. You didn't see it on TV. You lived it. And nobody can take that away from you."

Williams rambled at the speed of an F-16 from one topic to another, stopping on one only long enough to get a laugh or two before rolling on.

When one female soldier shouted out, "I love you, Robin," he said, "There's a lonely woman. If you're attracted to me, you've been here too long."

When a male soldier shouted

Coming to Ramstein

RAMSTEIN AIR BASE, Germany — Kinetic comedian and actor Robin Williams and a slate of other entertainers will appear at Ramstein Air Base's Hangar 1 for a USO show at 8 p.m. Friday.

Along with Williams, former Denver Broncos football star John Elway, model Lesann Tweeden and comedian and actor Blake Clark will appear.

The show is free and open to all Department of Defense ID card holders. Military members are encouraged to wear the uniform of the day.

Friday's show is not considered a family event, as some material might be inappropriate for children, the announcement said. Doors open an hour before show time.

From staff reports

something similar, he said, "You know we can't get married, but we can have a good time."

At the show's end, Williams posed for group pictures, which will be available in a few days on the Web site for the 1st Corps Support Command at www.bragg.army.mil/coscom. Clark joined Williams for the photos while Elway and Tweeden signed scores of autographs.

"I enjoyed it," said Airman Johnathan Roche of the 887th Customs Squadron. "Time well spent." Pfc. Richard Smith of the 502nd Engineer Battalion lived out a fantasy Tuesday night. The longtime Denver Broncos fan got Elway's autograph.

"It's like a dream," he said. "It's something I'll remember the rest of my life."

E-mail Ron Jensen at: jensen@mail.estrpides.osd.mil

Soldiers greeted with warm welcome home in Bamberg

BY RICK EMERT
Stars and Stripes

BAMBERG, Germany — Warner Barracks community members proved that size doesn't matter when it comes to welcoming their heroes home.

About 25 members of the Bamberg military community, including one family, were on hand Wednesday to greet nine soldiers from Headquarters, Headquarters Battery, Division Artillery, 1st Infantry Division as they returned from Iraq.

The soldiers were among the first group of 1st ID support personnel returning to division communities to help prepare for the division's return in February, according to Spc. Rebecca Sharpton, 1st ID spokeswoman.

The soldiers marched into the Bamberg chapel's family life center amid cheers and hugs from those gathered to greet them.

"It was nice that, even with this small group, we come home and have the community showing its support," said Master Sgt. Thomas Gruver. "It's very impressive."

Spc. Damien Demasio's family was waiting to greet him.

"The separation has been difficult," Demasio said, clutching his wife, Amber, and children Christian, 3, and Jaren, 6 months. "It's been hard on the kids, too, but it helped knowing that my wife had a lot of support back here."

Most of the soldiers who returned Wednesday were single; the families of the married soldiers, other than Demasio, were in the States, according to Maj. Erich Campbell, rear detachment commander for Division Artillery.

The group returned about five days earlier than expected; Campbell learned Tuesday that the soldiers would be back Wednesday.

"We got their rooms ready for them," Campbell said. "They are stocked with some quick foods and drinks. We got linen and made up their beds so they can just flop out [after the welcome ceremony]."

The nine cooks, along with four cooks from 1st Battalion, 3rd Field Artillery who returned Tuesday night, will open up the 1st Battalion, 6th Field Artillery dining facility to have it ready for 1st Infantry Division soldiers slated to return to Bamberg from Iraq in February.

Gruver said it was nice to be home but



SIMON HUFFER/Courtesy of the U.S. Army

Spc. Damien Demasio reunites with his wife, Amber, and children Jaren, 6 months, and Christian, 3, on Wednesday at Warner Barracks in Bamberg, Germany. Nine soldiers from Headquarters, Headquarters Battery, Division Artillery, 1st Infantry Division returned to Bamberg from Iraq to open up the 1st Battalion, 6th Field Artillery dining facility in preparation for the division's return in February.

difficult to leave with others from his unit still in Iraq; the cooks only recently learned that they would be returning early.

"It's hard, because there's still a mission

in Iraq," he said. "It was hard to split with the soldiers who are still there."

E-mail Rick Emert at: emert@mail.estrpides.osd.mil

Army turns focus to armoring trucks in Iraq

BY LISA BURGESS
Stars and Stripes

ARLINGTON, Va. — After expanding its contract to acquire armored Humvees at a rate of \$50 per month instead of \$30, the Army has now turned its focus toward armoring its trucks in Iraq by June, Army officials said Wednesday.

And in the future, thanks to lessons learned in Iraq and Afghanistan, all Army vehicles will be designed so they can be quickly armored with a kit — even if that vehicle was never designed for combat, according to Gary Motsek, the Army's deputy director for support operations at the U.S. Army Material Command at Fort Belvoir, Va.



Speakes

"We can't just go ahead and disregard the lessons of this campaign," Motsek said. "We are adapting our truck strategies now, [because] we'll never again assume that if you are going to operate a truck fleet, that it's going to be in conditions [that are] safe and secure."

The Humvee issue is now on track and fully funded, said Maj. Gen. Stephen Speakes, who joined Brig. Gen. Jeffrey Sorenson and other Army officials to discuss the armoring issue.

"A year ago, Humvees were the priority," Speakes said. "Now with the increase of lethality on the battlefield, it's time to



Gary Motsek, the Army's deputy director for support operations at the U.S. Army Material Command at Fort Belvoir, Va., shows the armored plating on the door of a HEMTT, the Army's Heavy Expanded Mobility Tactical Truck, at the Pentagon on Wednesday.

take care of the bigger trucks, and we're doing that."

The Army has sought out manufacturers to acquire armor kits for the larger vehicles. In August 2003, there were seven companies that supplied armor kits. There are now more than 20.

Today, 53 percent of the medium and heavy vehicles in Iraq that commanders

have said they would like armored actually have such protection, according to statistics provided by the Army.

Speakes, who is in charge of Force Development for the Army, said the service plans to spend \$4.1 billion to armor all of its wheeled vehicles by next summer.

The project to armor every wheeled transport vehicle will include armoring

5,878 "medium transport vehicles," such as five-ton trucks, and 4,443 "heavy transport vehicles," such as the 10-ton Heavy Expanded Mobility Tactical Truck (HEMTT), according to the statistics.

"We believe that by June, we will have Level I and Level II armor on the [remaining wheeled] force," Speakes said.

Level I is the Army's term for vehicles that were built from the ground-up to support armor, including a reinforced chassis to support the extra weight and configurations of the plating.

Level II is what the Army calls specially designed kits that are manufactured in the United States, then shipped to the Iraq theater for soldiers to install on their vehicles.

There is another Level, Level III, which Army officials use to describe the ad-hoc additions that soldiers devise on their own to protect their vehicles in the field.

Armoring vehicles not normally designed for combat operations became a serious issue in Iraq starting in early September 2003, as improvised explosive devices began to take more and more of a toll on U.S. forces in Iraq.

The Senate Armed Services Committee will hold hearings on the Iraq war when the new Congress convenes next month, including an examination of criticism that the Defense Department failed to prepare for the insurgency and went into action with a shortage of armor for trucks and Humvees, the panel's ranking Democrat, Sen. Carl Levin, D-Mich., told the Washington Post on Tuesday.

E-mail Lisa Burgess at: burgessl@stripes.osd.mil

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Toasting the Holidays

- If you are hosting a party, have non-alcoholic drinks for the drivers.
- Measure the amount of alcohol poured into drinks and use mixers.
- Serve plenty of appetizers as they slow down consumption of beverages. (Avoid salty foods.)
- Monitor guests for slurred speech, staggering and other signs of intoxication. Monitor ashtrays and furniture for hot cigarette ashes.

Holiday Driving

- Wear your seatbelt -- there is more traffic during the holidays.
- When attending or hosting a party, use designated drivers.
- At parties, have back-up plans that include taxis or sleeping arrangements.

Party Decorations

- Monitor candles at all times.
- When decorating at home, be sure tablecloths, bows and runners are kept away from flames.
- After gift-giving, discard wrapping paper, bows and trash as soon as possible.

IN THE WORLD



European Parliament members hold placards reading "Yes" in various languages Wednesday in Strasbourg, France, during a vote on a resolution asking EU members to open membership talks with Turkey immediately.

EU body urges talks with Turkey

The Associated Press

BRUSSELS, Belgium — The European Parliament called on European Union leaders Wednesday to open membership talks with Turkey as soon as possible, and urged Ankara to carry out more democratic reforms and move toward recognizing Cyprus.

The European Parliament, meeting in Strasbourg, France, voted 407 to 262, with 29 abstentions, to pass the resolution, which is nonbinding but nevertheless likely to influence leaders on the eve of a historic summit in Brussels on Turkey's membership application.

The resolution calls on leaders to "open the negotiations with Turkey without undue delay."

During their two-day summit, the 25 EU leaders are expected to approve opening membership talks with Ankara sometime next year.

The parliament urged Ankara to meet demands for a "zero-tolerance" approach to torture, which the legislature says is still being carried out by authorities in Turkey.

The resolution also said the opening of negotiations would "presuppose recognition by Tur-

key" of Cyprus, which joined the EU in May.

It urged Turkey to acknowledge "the genocide perpetrated against the Armenians" nearly a century ago. Turkey has been accused of killing as many as 1.5 million Armenians during a 1915-1923 campaign to force them from eastern Turkey. Ankara vehemently denies this.

Turkey's Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan welcomed the parliament vote. "This decision is very important — there are still many issues against (Turkey) but despite that, it is very meaningful," Erdogan said in Ankara.

Afghan abduction ends in slaying

Body of Turkish engineer is found

BY PAUL ALEXANDER

The Associated Press

KABUL, Afghanistan — The latest abduction of a foreigner in Afghanistan — a Turkish engineer working on a U.S.-sponsored road construction project — ended when the kidnappers killed him, apparently so he wouldn't slow them down with police hot on their trail.

Eyup Orel was working for a Serhat, a Turkish subcontractor for U.S.-based The Louis Berger Group, said company vice president Tom Nicastro. An Australian pilot for Berger was killed in February when a man raked his helicopter with AK-47 fire.

Orel was the second Turkish engineer to be killed in the restive Afghan countryside this year. Security forces found his body during a massive search operation, said Jamil Jumshad, head of the Interior Ministry's anti-terror division.

There was no immediate claim of responsibility. Bandits and insurgents from the Taliban and other Islamic extremist groups

operate in the area about 110 miles east of the capital, Kabul, officials said.

President Hamid Karzai condemned the killing, and ordered security agencies "to use any means possible" to bring the perpetrators to justice.

The U.S. Embassy said it was "angered and saddened."

Orel had been shot six or seven times in the head and torso, Kunar provincial police chief Matellulla Sofie said, adding that it appeared the kidnappers killed him so they could move faster and left his body high up a mountain as police moved in to try to capture them.

The kidnappers escaped, taking advantage of the rugged, forested terrain, Sofie said.

In March, Afghan forces freed two kidnapped Turkish engineers and an Afghan translator in a shootout with that left their two captors dead and two Afghan soldiers injured. Another Turkish engineer and an Afghan soldier were killed during the abduction a week earlier on the road from Kabul to the turbulent south.

Two hijack bus outside Athens; some hostages freed as 11 still captive

BY DEREK GATOPOULOS

The Associated Press

ATHENS, Greece — Two armed men hijacked a bus carrying more than two dozen passengers early Wednesday, threatening to blow it up with explosives unless they were taken to the airport and put on a plane, police and government officials said.

Government officials would not confirm reports that the men, identified by sources in the Athens prosecutor's office as Albanians, had initially demanded a driver to take them to the airport. The men seized control of the bus at 5:50 a.m. about 10.5 miles east of the city center. The bus driver, a ticket inspector and a passenger escaped soon after, and 12 other hostages — six women and six men — had been released about 12 hours into the standoff, officials said.

Police said 11 hostages — six men and five women — remained inside. That number was one less than previously reported by police.

As night began to fall, police pushed reporters away from the bus and tried to block their view of the scene.

Earlier in the day, one hostage

told NET television by cell phone that the hijackers said they would release the women in return for a driver and would set the remaining passengers free once they arrived at the airport.

"They want a driver to take them to the airport. They want to go to Russia," said Stella Matara. "They don't want money or anything else. They have guns and dynamite. I don't know what kind. They are treating us well."

One hijacker also told a Greek television station he wanted to go to Russia.

Sources in the Athens prosecutor's office said both men were Albanians with criminal records in Greece. They speculated the men tried to hide their identities by pretending to be of a different nationality.

The hijackers were armed with at least one pump action shotgun, which they were seen firing out of a bus window. It was unclear whether they actually had explosives.

Premier Costas Karamanlis delayed a trip to a European Union summit in Brussels Thursday in order to deal with the crisis, his spokesman said. A mass demonstration by Greece's main workers union to protest the rising cost of living was also postponed.

Egypt reviving Mideast peace plan

BY SUSAN SEVAREID

The Associated Press

CAIRO, Egypt — Egypt is generating new hope for Mideast peace after four bleak years, transforming Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon from pariah to peacemaker and seeking to draw Arab leaders and a wary public into its efforts.

The peace drive has included appeals to Arab rulers to support the new Palestinian leadership and an economic deal Tuesday that is arguably the biggest step in Egypt-Israeli relations in 25 years.

Egypt expects determined to

show Israel and President Bush, who has said a Palestinian state by 2009 is realistic, that the matter can be settled in 2005.

Egypt's plan is to follow an old one — the internationally backed "road map" for peace — and every step holds the potential for a set-back, though it is making fresh commitments to lessen risks.

"We are trying to create the atmosphere [so] that the two parties can sit down and start to talk," said Mohammed Bassiouni, Egypt's former ambassador to Israel, who insists Egypt's goals are realistic.

Egypt's diplomatic efforts en-

vision, according to Bassiouni, a March meeting in Cairo with representatives of all Palestinian factions to sign on to a protocol laying out their roles after a planned Israeli withdrawal from the Gaza Strip.

A British-sponsored international peace conference early in the year could lay out provisional borders for a Palestinian state, and Bassiouni said a second conference could be held around July for a final settlement.

But Egypt has a lot of persuading to do.

Neither the Israelis nor the Americans have embraced the British proposal. Saudi Arabia, the other Arab heavyweight, also has sounded reserved.

Australia plans security zone

SYDNEY, Australia — Australia plans to enforce a maritime security zone more than 1,100 miles out to sea, far beyond its territorial waters, in a move to boost defenses against possible terror attacks on its soil and offshore oil and gas facilities, Prime Minister John Howard said Wednesday.

Under the new plan — due to begin in March — all vessels will be required to present information to defense and customs authorities, Howard said.

World court rules for NATO nations

THE HAGUE, Netherlands — The International Court of Justice on Wednesday ruled that it has no jurisdiction in claims filed by Serbia and Montenegro against eight NATO countries for the 1999 bombing in Kosovo, because the Balkan nation was not then a member of the United Nations.

The former Yugoslavia claimed NATO countries that took part in the bombing campaign violated international law, and sought unspecified damages.

At least 5 dead in Sri Lanka

COLOMBO, Sri Lanka — Heavy floods and landslides across Sri Lanka have killed at least five people and forced the evacuation of around 133,000 people, an official and news reports said Wednesday.

The government has launched relief efforts to provide food and shelter to those affected.

Shooting breaks out in Haiti slum

PORT-AU-PRINCE, Haiti — Shootouts erupted between residents of a slum outside Haiti's capital and U.N. troops after hundreds of international peacekeepers attempted to control flashpoints of violence.

At least four people were killed in separate incidents Tuesday, with six people being shot in the Cite Soleil slum, including a 26-year-old woman, a 16-year-old boy and a 13-year-old boy.

From The Associated Press

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Defense in 'USS Cole case' demands retrial

BY AHMED AL-HAJ
The Associated Press

SANAA, Yemen — Defense lawyers in the appeals trial of six men convicted in the 2000 bombing of the USS Cole demanded a retrial Wednesday, saying investigation and procedures in the first trial were tarnished with errors.

The defense, in a 30-page memorandum, said procedures in the initial investigation were illegal and that the court was biased and refused to accept evidence submitted by the defense.

The prosecutors did not have any firm evidence to prove the involvement of the defendants in the attack, and the first instance court ruling was based on circum-

Lawyers say investigation, procedures in first trial were riddled with errors

stantial evidence that is considered illegal," the defense said.

The U.S. Embassy in Sana'a sent two representatives to attend the trial, which was adjourned until Dec. 29.

The first convictions in the al-Qaida attack that killed 17 American sailors were handed down in September, with four Yemenis sentenced to five to 10 years in prison. Two men — Abd al-Rahim al-Nashiri, a Saudi suspected of being an associate of

Osama bin Laden, and Yemeni militant Jamal al-Badawi — were sentenced to death.

In the opening of the appeals trial last week, prosecutors said defendants Fahd al-Qasbi and Maamoun al-Msoui, who were sentenced to 10 and eight years respectively, should be executed because their collaboration in planning the attack has been proven. They said Yemeni law stipulates that any crime that results in a death is punishable by death.

Al-Nashiri, who is believed to have masterminded the Cole attack and thought to have directed the 1998 bombings at the U.S. embassies in Kenya and Tanzania, was the only defendant not present during the trial. He is in U.S. custody at an undisclosed location.

Two suicide bombers rammed an explosives-laden boat into the USS Cole destroyer as it refueled in the southern Yemeni port city of Aden on Oct. 12, 2000, killing 17 American sailors and injuring 37 others.

Yemen, which had long tolerated Muslim extremists, cracked down on militants following the Sept. 11, 2001, attacks and aligned itself with the U.S.-led war on terror.

Swedish bomb scare

STOCKHOLM, Sweden — Part of the Swedish capital was sealed off Wednesday morning after a bomb scare that police said was linked to an attempt to extort money from an employee of a currency exchange office.

An area around downtown Stockholm's Hoogstraten square was evacuated, and a bomb squad removed the package shortly before noon, said Kjell Lindgren, a police spokesman. It was not immediately clear whether it contained any explosives.

Kyoto Protocol warning

ROME — Italy's environment minister warned that if the United States, China and India don't join the Kyoto Protocol, the world will have to rely on bilateral accords and voluntary efforts to reduce greenhouse gas emissions, reports said Wednesday.

Italy has ratified the Kyoto Protocol and hosted the climate change conference in Milan last year. The Kyoto Protocol was given a boost when Russia signed up last month, under pressure from the EU.

Afghan drugs in Russia

MOSCOW — A rising tide of drugs from Afghanistan has swept Russia, triggering a steady increase in the number of drug-related crimes, officials told parliament Wednesday.

According to experts' estimates, about 4 million of Russia's 144 million people are drug addicts, Russia's Interior Minister Rashid Nurgaliyev said.

Congested air travel

BRUSSELS, Belgium — European air travelers face severe congestion problems by 2025 if air travel continues to expand at the current rate, according to a report released Tuesday.

It said demand for air travel is expected to more than double by 2025, meaning "a potential 3.7 million flights per year will not be accommodated, even if the capacity of the airport network increases by 60 percent."

From wire reports

Indonesian terror attack possible

Australia: Intelligence indicates Hilton hotel may be target

BY MIKE CORDER
The Associated Press

SYDNEY, Australia — Terrorists are ready to carry out an attack in Indonesia, possibly targeting a Hilton hotel, Australia said Wednesday, on the eve of a two-day visit to Jakarta by the country's defense minister.

Australia's Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade issued a statement saying it had "received credible new information suggesting terrorists are ready to carry out an attack shortly in Indonesia, possibly targeting a Hilton hotel," adding "other targets cannot be ruled out."

Foreign Minister Alexander Downer, speaking in Papua New

Guinea where he was attending a conference, said the attack could be on a Hilton or another western hotel and urged Australians to keep away from them.

The government statement did not elaborate on where the information came from. Pranowo Dahlan, head of Indonesia's anti-terror unit, said he was unaware of the new warning.

Downer said: "This is credible information from intelligence. We wouldn't be passing it on if we weren't particularly concerned about the information."

The Hilton hotel chain has three hotels in Indonesia: in the capital, Jakarta; on the tourist island of Bali; and in the industrial city of Surabaya on Java island.

"We have not received any warning from the police or the Australian embassy," said Shakra Tamayanti, the public relations manager at the Hilton Jakarta.

She said security at Hilton hotels in Indonesia had been boosted since the 2002 terror bombings on Bali island that killed 202 people, including 88 Australians.

Canberra warned Australians in Indonesia to avoid all international hotels and other places where foreigners gather.

It also again advised Australians to defer all nonessential travel to Indonesia, while Australians already there who fear for their safety should consider leaving the country.

Australian Defense Minister Robert Hill was due to arrive in Jakarta on Thursday for a two-day trip. His visit was going ahead as planned.

"In the lead-up to the Christmas and New Year holiday period, we continue to receive reports that terrorists in the region are planning attacks against a range of targets," the foreign ministry said in a travel advisory for Indonesia.

"Terrorist attacks could occur at any time, anywhere in Indonesia and could be directed against any locations known to be frequented by foreigners," it warned.

On Sept. 9, terrorists attacked Australia's embassy in Jakarta, killing 10 people.

Decoration to stay at U.S. mission in Cuba

Americans say Cubans don't like Christmas lights referring to 75 jailed dissidents

BY VANESSA ARRINGTON
The Associated Press

HAVANA — The Cuban government has warned the U.S. diplomatic mission in Havana to immediately take down Christmas decorations outside its offices or face unspecified consequences, the top American diplomat on the island said Tuesday.

The trimmings of Santa Claus, candy canes and white lights wrapped in palm trees on the mission's seaside lawn aren't the problem.

What was likely irritating the Cuban authorities, U.S. Interest Section Chief James Cason said, is a lighted sign about 3 feet in diameter among the decorations that reads "75" — a reference to 75 Cuban dissidents jailed last year.

The sign was among the decorations closest to Havana's coastal Malecon highway.

"Our intent, in the spirit of Christmas, was to call attention to the plight of these 75," Cason told reporters. "We're prepared to pay whatever price for the things we believe in."

In meetings Saturday and Tuesday, Cuban Foreign Ministry officials insisted the decorations be taken down, Cason said. The U.S. Interest Section refused, and was told it would face unspecified consequences.

"They could expel us, they could continue

to hinder our activities," Cason said. "We don't know what they're going to do."

U.S. relations, never good during Fidel Castro's four decades of communist rule, have deteriorated under the Bush administration, which has toughened economic sanctions and publicized its plan for a democratic Cuba after the death of the 78-year-old leader.

The United States and Cuba have not had diplomatic relations since shortly after Castro took over. In lieu of embassies, interest sections provide consular services and limited official contact.

The dissidents imprisoned last year were accused of receiving money from U.S. officials to undermine the island's system — a charge the activists and the U.S. government denied.

They were sentenced to up to 28 years in prison, but 14 have been released for medical reasons.

Cason said the Cuban government was annoyed by an event at the mission for relatives of political prisoners and a Christmas party held for their children. He said state security officers outside his house intimidated the children as they arrived to the party.

"Our position is that our Christmas decorations are up through Christmas," he said. "It's a matter of principle to us."



James Cason, head of the U.S. Interests Section in Havana, Cuba, speaks Tuesday of the Cuban government's complaint about the inclusion of lights relating to the 75 Cuban jailed dissidents among the Christmas decorations outside the U.S. mission's offices.

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Jewish memorial now set

BY MATT SURMAN
The Associated Press

BERLIN — The builders of Germany's national Holocaust memorial put into place Wednesday the last of thousands of charcoal-colored slabs to commemorate the 6 million Jews who died at the hands of the Nazis.

The event signaled a symbolic end to a 15-year battle over the building of the project, which has been tangled in debates about financing, artistic vision and Nazi-era guilt.

But backers of the Memorial to the Murdered Jews of Europe said Wednesday they expected differences over its meaning to continue even once it is completely finished.

"The fight hasn't damaged the memorial," Parliament President Wolfgang Thierse said, standing in front of the 2,711 stark concrete stones that stretched over a plot of land the size of two football fields. But "the argument presumably goes on," he said.

The entire monument will still



German Speaker of Parliament Wolfgang Thierse, second from right, and U.S. architect Peter Eisenman, right, watch the setting of the last concrete slab at the Holocaust memorial in Berlin on Wednesday.

require more work — including the paving of paths and finishing of an information center — before it is officially opened by German Chancellor Gerhard Schröder on May 10, 2005.

In March, Berlin Jewish groups demanded that architect Peter Eisenman, who is himself Jewish, resign from the project, claiming he told an anti-Semitic joke.

Eisenman has said the undulating rows of closely spaced slabs

set slightly below street level were designed to evoke the feeling of being trapped that Jews felt when they were sent to Nazi death camps.

The uneven field of concrete blocks sits in an area heavy with German history: near where Nazi leader Adolf Hitler died in his underground bunker in 1945, the area was also part of the Berlin Wall's no man's land during the Cold War.

Cayman Islands are hit by strongest quake in decades

BY JAY EHRLHART
The Associated Press

GEORGETOWN, Cayman Islands — A strong earthquake shook the Cayman Islands, rattling windows and sending residents fleeing into the streets, but caused no major damage, authorities said Wednesday.

The tremor on Tuesday registered 6.7 on the Richter scale, according to the U.S. Geological Survey based in Golden, Colo.

There were no immediate reports of injuries or serious damage, government spokeswoman Patricia Ebanks said Wednesday.

The initial quake lasted about 10 seconds and small after-shocks were felt for more than a half hour, residents said.

The epicenter of the earthquake was located 20 miles south-southeast of George Town. It was the strongest tremor to hit the Cayman Islands since 1900, the U.S. Geological Survey reported.

It also was one of several to strike the region in the last month, but seismologists said the quakes were unrelated. Activity in the Caribbean, however, had been high.

A tremor with a magnitude of 5.7 jolted the British Virgin Islands, the U.S. Virgin Islands and Puerto Rico on Saturday. No injuries were reported and there was little damage.

Another earthquake with a magnitude of 5.4, however, caused at least 90 aftershocks on Dec. 3 in Trinidad, leaving at least one woman dead and damaging several buildings and houses.

Last month, a 6.3-magnitude earthquake in the Caribbean island of Dominica caused an estimated \$20 million worth of damages.

The Cayman Islands have been plagued with disaster this year, recently releasing an estimate of hurricane damage caused by Hurricane Ivan at more than \$3 billion.

Ozzy misses his chance to perform for royalty

The Associated Press

LONDON — Ozzy Osbourne skipped an appointment with Prince Charles to keep an appointment with his doctor.

Osbourne was scheduled to perform at the Royal Variety Performance on Tuesday, with Prince Charles topping the guest list, but pulled out because he had an operation to adjust a metal plate in his shoulder, his wife Sharon said.

The rock star injured the shoulder when he crashed a quad bike, and then damaged the plate when he tried to tackle a burglar at his home last month.

"After his quad bike accident, Ozzy had a plate put in his neck held by screws. Some of the screws were dislodged during his fight with the man who broke into our house and it made him very uncomfortable," Sharon Osbourne said.

"It sounds worse than it is and he only needed a day visit, but unfortunately because he is recovering he couldn't perform tonight. Ozzy is really sad to have missed it," she said.

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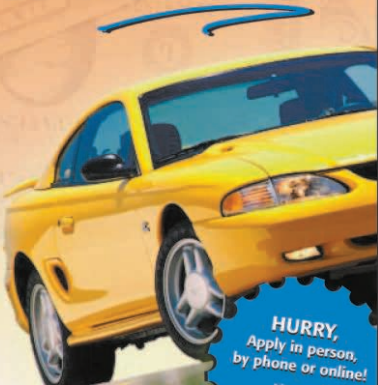


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IN THE STATES

Bush makes pledge for strong-dollar policy

BY TERENCE HUNT
The Associated Press

WASHINGTON — President Bush pledged Wednesday to work with Congress to reduce the United States' huge deficits to assure markets that his administration supports a strong dollar.

"The policy of my government is a strong-dollar policy," Bush said during an Oval Office meeting with Italian Prime Minister Silvio Berlusconi.

"We're going to take this issue on seriously

with the Congress," the president said, after Berlusconi raised concerns about the dollar's fall.

Bush, during a photo opportunity in the Oval Office, noted that in addition to the budget deficit, America suffers from a huge trade deficit.

"That's easy to resolve," Bush said. "People can buy more United States products if they're worried about the trade deficit."

Bush's comments came a day after the government reported that America's trade deficit hit a monthly record of \$55.5 billion in October.

Some economists believe that the administration, while publicly professing support for a strong dollar, actually prefers the decline in the greenback's value against other currencies as a way of dealing with the country's huge trade deficit.

A weaker dollar would make U.S. goods cheaper for foreign markets while making imports more expensive for Americans, thus boosting the fortunes of domestic manufacturers. The country has lost 2.7 million manufacturing jobs over the past three years.

Despite White House expressions of sup-

port, the administration has not taken action to prop up the dollar. During Bush's four years in office, not once has the administration intervened in currency markets to support the dollar or do anything else to stop the dollar's slide.

"We believe that the markets should make the decision about the relationship between the dollar and the euro," Bush said.

The decline in the dollar means that a vacation for Americans in Europe is more expensive, and European products coming into this country cost more.

Missile test fails

WASHINGTON — An interceptor missile failed to launch early Wednesday in what was to have been the first full flight test of the U.S. national missile defense system in nearly two years.

The Missile Defense Agency has attempted to conduct the test several times this month, but scrubbed each one for a variety of reasons, including various weather problems.

The announcement said the inter-ceptor experienced an automatic shutdown "due to an unknown anomaly."

Sprint buys Nextel

NEW YORK — Telecommunications giant Sprint Corp. is acquiring Nextel Communications Inc. in a \$35 billion deal that would create the nation's third largest wireless telephone service provider.

The transaction, announced Wednesday, would create a company called Sprint Nextel with about \$4 billion in combined yearly revenue and more than 35 million wireless subscribers, trailing only Cingular Wireless and Verizon Wireless.

Sprint would get access to Nextel's 15.3 million subscribers, many of whom are business customers, and Nextel would avoid a costly upgrade of its own network. The companies estimated the merger would save them \$12 billion in operating costs and network upgrades.

Anthrax attack study

NEW YORK — Giving a new generation anthrax vaccine along with antibiotics in response to a terrorist attack wouldn't prevent much disease, but it could help by letting people take the medicines for a briefer time, a U.S. study suggests.

In fact, it would make more sense to use an anthrax vaccine after an attack than to try to carry out mass vaccination beforehand, said Ron Brookmeyer of Johns Hopkins University, lead author of the study.

That's because it would be difficult to vaccinate enough people before an attack to equal the protection conferred by a speedy response to anthrax from a combination of antibiotics and vaccines, he said.

The computerized analysis of the use of an anthrax vaccine is presented in Thursday's issue of the journal *Nature*.

From The Associated Press

U.S. Justice Department urged to open investigation into leaks of spy project

BY TED BRIDIS
The Associated Press

WASHINGTON — The U.S. Justice Department is considering a request to investigate the disclosure of secrets about an expensive American spy satellite project criticized by some senior Democratic senators, a law enforcement official says.

The formal request for a leaks investigation would target people who described sensitive details about a new generation of spy satellite of anonymity. The Washington Post, which published a page-one story about the controversial espionage program on Saturday, said this official, speaking Tuesday on condition of anonymity.

The Justice Department has not yet determined whether classified information was leaked and has not decided whether to investigate, the official said.

The request came from an unspecified intelligence agency.

Under Justice guidelines, prosecutors review such requests to ensure they meet strict requirements — such as whether the information was properly classified — before launching a criminal investigation. They also ask the requesting agency for a list of everyone with authorized access to the information and whether the agency is willing to disclose enough information to support a criminal trial.

The Washington Post's executive editor, Leonard Downie, said the newspaper does not discuss its sources.

Disclosures about the project emerged after stinging criticism of its cost and effectiveness last week from Sen. Jay Rockefeller of West Virginia, the senior Democrat on the Intelligence Committee, and three other senators on the panel.

Rockefeller complained that the program — which he declined to describe in detail — was expensive, unjustified and wasteful, and he pledged to keep trying to kill it.

The program is aimed at making surveillance satellites difficult to detect and uses new technology to reduce their size, among other means, said one official familiar with the program, who also spoke on condition of anonymity. Under way for nearly a decade, the project is aimed at producing fully capable spy satellites that could fit in a car trunk, this official said.

Rockefeller complained the program was "stunningly expensive."

The Post reported Saturday its projected cost has nearly doubled from \$5 billion to nearly \$9.5 billion.

The National Reconnaissance Office, which designs, builds and operates a constellation of U.S. spy satellites, declined to comment.

Rockefeller and the other Democrats — Sens. Richard Durbin of Illinois, Carl Levin of Michigan and Ron Wyden of Oregon — all refused last week to sign a compromise bill that was part of Congress' new blueprint for U.S. intelligence spending. The Senate nevertheless voted to send the program to President Bush for approval.

The Senate Ethics Committee might be asked to determine whether Rockefeller, Wyden and Durbin disclosed any sensitive information and should face sanctions, a congressional aide said. Intelligence Committee rules prohibit members from disclosing intelligence information or discussing what happened in closed, executive sessions.

Ridge: Color-coded terror warnings get review

BY ELLIOT SPAGAT
The Associated Press

SAN DIEGO — Outgoing Homeland Security Secretary Tom Ridge said Tuesday that the government should reconsider how it warns people about security threats, conceding that its color-coded scale has invited "questions and even occasional derision."

Ridge's remarks came at a meeting of the Homeland Security Advisory Council — created to advise the secretary on how to run the sprawling new department.

Ridge, who plans to step down after President Bush names a successor, defended the color-coded warnings, but said the public may want more specifics when the threat level is changed.

"I think the system is here to stay," he told reporters. "I just think that we need clearly to take a look at what kind of information we need to give to the public."

The warning system assigns red, orange, yellow, blue and green, in descending order of risk, but it has sowed confusion since being adopted in 2002.

Bruce Lawlor, who stepped down as Ridge's chief of staff last year, said the color scale suffers "credibility issues" and may have activated its purpose.

"I think we need to step back and say, 'Do we really need to rely on colors?'" said Lawlor, a retired Army major general.

Massachusetts Gov. Mitt Romney, who participated by phone, chided the federal government for giving sometimes-confusing signals about terrorist threats to state and local officials.

Information comes from Homeland Security, Defense and other departments — and it is not always in sync.

"It's like the fire hydrant has been opened," Romney said.

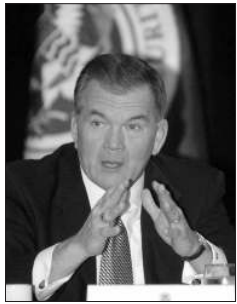
Ridge agreed, saying his department should be a leading contender to be the single funnel of information on domestic threats.

"Whether or not we win the turf war, who knows?" he said.

Bush still must name a new head of the Homeland Security Department to take the place of Bernard Kerik, who abruptly withdrew Friday night. Kerik cited an immigration problem with a nanny he employed, but a series of news reports about possible personal and professional improprieties have emerged in recent days.

"I don't think there's any impact at all on the department," Ridge told reporters. "Frankly, I just think it's a bit on the screen."

Twenty-two disparate federal agencies with more than 180,000 employees and a combined budget of \$36 billion were merged in March 2003 to form the Homeland Security Department.



Homeland Security Secretary Tom Ridge speaks Tuesday at the opening of a meeting of the Homeland Security Advisory Council in San Diego. He said the department's color-coded terror scale will be reviewed.

Fed nudges interest rates by quarter point

BY MARTIN CRUTSINGER
The Associated Press

WASHINGTON — The U.S. Federal Reserve on Tuesday raised interest rates for the fifth time since June and signaled it was likely to keep pushing them higher at a "measured" pace in the new year.

The latest quarter-point increase raised the federal funds rate, the interest that banks charge each other, to 2.25 percent, more than double the 46-year low of 1 percent in effect

when the Fed kicked off its credit-tightening campaign six months ago.

The increases have been designed to back off slowly from the exceptionally low interest rates the central bank had put in place over the previous three years as it battled a bursting stock market, a bubble, a recession and the Sept. 11, 2001, terrorist attacks.

Responding to the latest increase, commercial banks quickly moved to boost their prime lending rate, the benchmark for

millions of consumer loans and business loans, by a quarter-point to 5.25 percent.

The Fed's action — and comments — bolstered confidence on Wall Street and pushed stock prices higher. The Standard & Poor's 500 and the technology-heavy Nasdaq index both closed at their highest levels since before the 2001 terrorist attacks. The Dow Jones industrial average was up as well, rising 38.13 points to finish the day at 10,676.45, the Dow's best close since last March.

Economists give Federal Reserve Chairman Alan Greenspan and his colleagues high marks for navigating the tricky transition away from an extremely easy money policy that had been in effect for an extended period without causing the financial upheavals that have happened in the past.

Greenspan joked recently that "rising interest rates have been advertised for so long and in so many places that anyone who hasn't appropriately hedged his

position by now obviously is desirous of losing money."

In its latest action, the Fed repeated its pledge that with inflation pressures remaining low, the central bank should be able to keep raising rates at a "measured" pace.

That could translate into further quarter-point rate hikes through the first half of next year until the central bank decides it has reached a "neutral" level for monetary policy. In which case, they are neither stimulating economic growth nor acting as a drag on growth.

Ky. high school shooting victim set to graduate from college

BY KIMBERLY HEFLING
The Associated Press

EVANSVILLE, Ind. — Missy Jenkins lost the use of her legs when she was struck by a bullet in a 1997 school shooting that left three classmates dead. But she never lost hope.

Now 22, Jenkins is set to graduate Saturday from Murray State University in Kentucky with a degree in social work and a desire to work with teens to prevent similar shootings from happening.

"Life is too short to be angry. I learned that," said Jenkins, who was hit in the shoulder by a bullet that spiraled into her spinal cord, paralyzing her from the waist down. "I could've died that morning, so I wanted to finish out life being happy, not being angry."

During her time in university, she has given motivational speeches encouraging teenagers to come forward if they are being bullied or know of bullying.

She said bullying led Michael Carneal, then 14, to open fire on her prayer circle group at Heath High School in Paducah, Ky., on Dec. 1, 1997. "I wanted to work with kids like him, hoping to prevent what he did," Jenkins said.

"Before this happened to me, I really didn't feel like I had a direction in my life. I was a 15-year-old kid that thought nothing would ever happen to me like that. After this happened to me, it gave me direction."

Jenkins said she has forgiven Carneal, who was sentenced in 1998 to life in prison without the chance of parole for 25 years.

Still, she said the Paducah shooting could have been prevented if Carneal had been seen. Carneal with a gun at school two weeks earlier had reported him to teachers. Carneal had bragged that something big was going to happen.

Karen Guthrie, youth services coordinator at Caloway County Middle School in Murray, said after Jenkins spoke to students at her school, 10 different students told teachers that they had been bullied or knew someone who was. "What is so inspiring," Guthrie said, "is that she's accomplished what she sets every day, it humbles me."



FORT WORTH STAR-TELEGRAM/AP

Fans of murdered rock guitarist "Dimebag" Darrell Abbott gather at the Arlington Convention Center on Tuesday in Arlington, Texas, for a public memorial after Abbott's funeral. The former guitarist for Pantera, Abbott was shot to death last week while performing with his new band at a Columbus, Ohio, nightclub.

Stars, fans mourn 'Dimebag' Darrell

BY BOBBY ROSS JR.
The Associated Press

ARLINGTON, Texas — The smoke was thick, the music loud. The rum and the bourbon flowed, and so did the tears.

Guitar-shaped funeral wreaths lined the stage as thousands of grieving fans, many wearing concert T-shirts, gathered Tuesday night to remember slain rock star "Dimebag" Darrell Abbott.

"This guy was full of life. He lived and breathed rock 'n' roll," guitarist Eddie Van Halen said in a profanity-laced tribute to his heavy metal friend.

The 38-year-old Abbott — best known as the former guitarist for Pantera — was shot to death last week in Columbus, Ohio, while performing with his new band, Damageplan. Three others also were killed before police fatally shot 25-year-old gunman Nathan Gale.

The public memorial service followed a private funeral Tuesday that Abbott's friend Jerry Cantrell, a singer in the 1990s rock band Alice in Chains, described as "beautiful."

"Today's really been the start of the healing process," said Cantrell, who performed at the funeral and again at the public service.

Pictures of a grinning Abbott, his long hair hanging past his shoulders, covered three big screens. Strobe lights pierced through the darkness as speak-

er after speaker stepped to the stage, remembering how Abbott made playing the guitar look easy and how — as one friend put it — "the always looked at the glass as half full, figuratively and literally."

Van Halen shared the stage with guitarist Zakk Wylde, the two downing shots of liquor as they talked about their rock comrade.

"A whole part of my life is gone," said a red-eyed Wylde, telling the crowd he hadn't eaten in four days, instead relying on a "liquid diet."

Van Halen stuck his cell phone to the microphone and played a voice mail message that Abbott left for him after a concert where both performed.

"I just wanted to give you a ... call to tell you thank you so much, man, for the most awesome, uplifting, euphoric, spiritual rock 'n' roll extravaganza ever," Abbott told Van Halen.

The crowd saved its loudest applause for Abbott's brother, drummer Vinnie Paul Abbott, who patted a life-sized cardboard cutout of his brother holding a guitar and encouraged fans as they chanted "Dimebag! Dimebag! Dimebag!"

Abbott, who attended Arlington High School and lived in nearby Dalworthington Gardens, had formed Damageplan with his brother after they left Pantera.

Vinnie Paul said his brother gave everything he had every night and "went down" doing what he loved.

Colorado voter turnout

DENVER — Colorado's voter turnout in November's general election that featured hotly contested presidential and Senate races was 87 percent — a record for the state.

More than 2.1 million voters went to the polls, according to data released Tuesday by Secretary of State Donetta Davidson.

Turnout was calculated using the number of Colorado's active voters, roughly 2.4 million. The office considers voters active if they cast ballots in the 2002 or 2003 general elections.

The state hasn't had a turnout greater than 80 percent since the 1980s and no election has ever reached 87 percent, Davidson said.

Flight attendants rally

WASHINGTON — Airline employees, rallying outside the White House, accused the Bush administration Tuesday of siding with airline managers who the flight attendants say are claiming financial hardship to deny their employees a decent living.

"We will strike when the first bankruptcy judge throws out a flight attendant contract," Patricia Friend, president of the Association of Flight Attendants-CWA, said at a rally by 200 airline workers.

Flight attendants, pilots, maintenance workers and their supporters marched in a line out to protest what they called a long deterioration in working conditions, accelerated by efforts at airlines such as United and US Airways to use the bankruptcy process to cancel union contracts and impose deep pay cuts.

From The Associated Press

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Evolution in schools going back to court

Two civil liberties groups file suit in Pennsylvania

BY AMY WORDEN

Knight Ridder Newspapers

HARRISBURG, Pa. — Almost 80 years after the trial of Tennessee biology teacher John Scopes launched the landmark battle between science and religion, a lawsuit filed in Pennsylvania on Tuesday might reopen national debate over the teaching of evolution.

Two civil liberties groups, representing 11 parents in a community 25 miles southwest of here, sued the Dover Area School District seeking to block its introduction next month of "intelligent design" in the science curriculum.

The suit, which contends that the teaching of intelligent design violates the constitutional separation of church and state, is believed to be the first of its kind.

The intelligent design theory, first advanced in the late 1980s, holds that the universe is so complex that a supernatural force must be at work.

The suit, filed in U.S. District Court by the ACLU of Pennsylvania and Americans United for the Separation of Church and State, argues that intelligent design is "neither scientific nor a theory in the scientific sense; it is an inherently religious argument."

Witold Walczak, legal director for the Pennsylvania ACLU chapter, called intelligent design "a Trojan horse for bringing religious creationism back into the public school science classroom."

The Rev. Barry Lynn, executive director of Americans United for Separation of Church and State, urged the school district to reconsider its decision.

In October, the Dover school board voted to require ninth-grade biology teachers to read a statement that Darwin's theory, that life evolved through a process of natural selection, is "not fact" and that "gaps in the theory exist for which there is no evidence." The directive is scheduled to go into effect in January.

Officials of the school district, which has 3,600 pupils, could not be reached Tuesday to comment on the case.

School board member William Buckingham, who spearheaded the change as the leader of the board's curriculum committee, has said in the past that he proposed the change as a way to balance evolution with competing theories that present an alternate view of how life began.

Knight Ridder Newspapers correspondent Kathy Boccia contributed to this report.



Witold J. Walczak, legal director for the state Chapter of the American Civil Liberties Union, speaks Tuesday about its evolution lawsuit in Harrisburg, Pa.

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Fox adoption show appalls some

BY DAVID BAUDER

The Associated Press

NEW YORK — The Fox network said Tuesday it will air a special next month, "Who's Your Daddy?", where a daughter given up for adoption as an infant attempts to guess the identity of her birth father for a \$100,000 prize.

Adoption activists immediately attacked the special, which will air for 90 minutes on Jan. 3.

"This is really perverse," said Adam Pertman, executive director of the Evan P. Donaldson Adoption Institute, a research and policy organization. "It takes a deeply personal and important experience and turns it into a money-grubbing game show. I think it is despicable."

A Fox network spokesman would not comment on the special, referring all calls to the producers, who said people shouldn't judge before watching. "I find it curious that people are calling it that without having seen an episode," said Scott Hallock, one of three executive producers of the series for the Fox Television Studios.

"You might get the impression from the title that it is somehow salacious or exploitive. But nothing could be further from the truth."

The woman who is the focus of the show, not identified by Fox, and her birth father were both involved in simultaneous searches for each other.

Her natural dad will be one of eight men presented to her, all claiming to be her father.

She will be given opportunities to observe and interview the men to narrow the field, the network announced.

If she correctly guesses which man is her father, the woman can win as much as \$100,000. If she is incorrect, the impostor that she chose will win the money, Fox said.

Either way, the special will end with the father and daughter being reunited.

Joseph Krill, executive director of the North American Council on Adoptable Children, called the idea "repulsive." He said his own 29-year-old daughter is searching for her birth father.

"If someone were to try to doing that to my daughter, what I consider to be abuse, I would not behave appropriately," Krill said.

All the participants felt it was a positive experience, said Kevin Healey, another executive producer.

Fox had been known to be working on the show for months. This past summer, in a public tiff with Fox over competing boxing reality shows, NBC chief executive Jeff Zucker revealed Fox was working on the concept. Angry that Zucker had discussed their internal plans, Fox executives wouldn't comment on it.

Supreme Court awed by visit from ex-basketball star Charles Barkley

BY GINA HOLLAND

The Associated Press

WASHINGTON — The Supreme Court's solemn atmosphere was broken Tuesday as usually subdued workers snapped to attention, riveted by a guest in the cafeteria.

What legal giant could create such a scene? None — it was former basketball star Charles Barkley, who stopped by to visit an old friend, Justice Clarence Thomas.

Barkley patiently posed for pictures and signed autographs for giddy court employees.

The notoriously outspoken Barkley, considered a possible candidate for Alabama governor someday, was polite and politician-like.

Famous people are often spotted in the court, ranging from the justices themselves to well-known lawyers and big-name television journalists. None got the rock-star treatment of Barkley.

The nearly 6-foot-5 former forward — who played for Philadelphia, Phoenix and Houston before retiring in 1999 — was sprawled at a table just a few feet from the cafeteria check-out for a half hour or so while word spread through the Supreme Court building and the crowd of admirers grew.

Barkley, a member of the original U.S. Olympic basketball "Dream Team" in 1992 who in 1996 was named one of the National Basketball Association's 50

greatest players, accommodated his fans before heading upstairs to Thomas' office.

Barkley and Thomas are both from the South — Barkley comes from Alabama and Thomas from Georgia — and share a passion for basketball.

A basketball court is located in a secluded area on the Supreme Court building's top floor. It's not listed in tourist information and is closed to visitors.

Known informally as the "highest court in the land," it is used for games between law clerks and court employees — and, occasionally, justices.

Thomas has not been a regular player since tearing his Achilles tendon during a game on the court. Barkley can sympathize. He ruptured a knee tendon in 1999.

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Less 'Heart'

AL MONTGOMERY — The state slogan "Heart of Dixie," a source of pride to some and embarrassment to others, is disappearing from more Alabama license plates every year.

One-third of the groups that promote distinctive and collegiate license plates now choose to leave the slogan off their tags.

The standard state license plate still has "Heart of Dixie," as required by state law, but it's reduced to letters one-sixteenth of an inch high, printed on a bottom corner.

Former Gov. Don Siegelman, who approved that design, said he wanted it to foster positive images at a time when Alabama was trying to recruit international corporations.

Gas station shooting

MA MEDFORD — A gas station attendant in Medford pulled his own gun on two would-be robbers, shooting and wounding one of the suspects, police said. The second suspect got away.

"It looked like self-defense," Medford police Lt. Paul Covino said of the incident at Fred's Gas Auto Service on Mystic Avenue. He said the gun was registered to the attendant, who was licensed to carry a firearm.

No charges have been filed against the attendant, who was not identified. Police said he fired seven or eight shots at the suspects.

Unconfirmed alcohol

LA GRETNA — Traces of alcohol were detected in the suspected "Jell-O shots" taken to school by a fourth grader — leading to her suspension — but it could have been the result of natural fermentation, a school official said.

School board president Gene Katsanis said the gelatin cannot be retested because it was not refrigerated after being discovered in the student's book bag. Katsanis said, "It will always remain a mystery," he said.

Artifacts wash up

DE LEWES — Visitors to a newly rebuilt beach near Roosevelt Inlet have been finding hundreds of artifacts that could be more than 300 years old. The items were dredged from the bottom of the Delaware Bay. It's not known if the artifacts were from a shipwreck or an early colonial settlement submerged by erosion.

Can't find the birds

HI OLINDA — Bad weather on Maui has prevented wildlife experts from spotting what they believe are the last two po'ouli birds on earth.

The quest to save the rare birds took on new urgency last month with the death of a male bird captured for breeding.

There are believed to be two remaining birds in the wild, but 10 straight days of rain in the Hanalei Natural Area Reserve have hindered scientists' efforts to locate them.

The po'ouli has its own Hawaiian name: *lele-aka*. It is so unique it has its own genus. It was not discovered until 1973,



AMERICAN ROUNDUP

when a group of University of Hawaii students conducting research on the east slope of Haleakala volcano sighted a bird they had never seen before.

Stopping drunken drivers

LA BATON ROUGE — The Louisiana Highway Safety Commission will provide \$500,000 to pay for overtime for patrols dedicated to getting drunk drivers off the roads during the holidays. Since 1999, an average of 25 people have been killed in Louisiana highway crashes over the holidays every year. Commission official James Champagne said almost half of the New Year's fatalities and one-third of the Christmas fatalities were alcohol-related.

Freud after 12 years

TX FORT WORTH — Texas officials freed a man who spent 12 years in prison after he was wrongfully convicted of molesting a 3-year-old girl.

John Michael Harvey, 40, was released after the state Court of Criminal Appeals ruled 5-4 there was not enough evidence to convict him after his alleged victim recanted more than a decade after he was jailed. Prosecutors have said they do not plan to seek a new trial.

Harvey missed a lot during 12

years behind bars, including marrying his girlfriend and spending time with his parents, none of whom doubted his innocence.

His relationship with his fiancée fell apart after he was sentenced to 40 years in prison in 1992. After draining most of his life savings to defend him, his father died in 2000 and his mother passed away two years later.

Harvey's nightmare started in 1989, when he returned from a trip and learned police had searched his Bedford apartment. When he went to find out why, authorities arrested him for sexual assault of a child.

He said he was offered a plea deal, but did not want to admit to something he did not do.

Rooftop crash

CA LOS ANGELES — A small helicopter crashed on the roof of a downtown skyscraper while trying to make an emergency landing, authorities said.

Two men aboard the privately owned aircraft were uninjured in the 10 a.m. crash. The cause remained under investigation.

The two-seat Robinson R-22 was badly damaged when it crashed next to the helipad atop the 54-story Wells Fargo building, city Fire Department spokesman Brian Humphrey said.

There was no fire, and no debris fell from the building, Humphrey said. The National Transportation Safety Board was investigating.

Bush photos controversy

PA LANCASTER — A Democratic city councilman is demanding that a baker remove photos of President Bush from his stand in Lancaster's farmers market, saying the city needs a "healing period" following the bitterly contested election.

City Councilman Nelson Polite asked baker David Stoltzfus last month to remove the pictures. When Stoltzfus refused, Polite threatened to try to enact a city ordinance that would ban all political material from public places.

"I just feel that since it was a close election and the city's so divided, that we should have a healing period," Polite told the New Era of Lancaster.

Republican Mayor Charlie Smithgall said potential visitors have told him they will skip the old city in the heart of Amish country because of Polite's statements.

DNA helps rape cases

VA NORFOLK — DNA test results that freed two men imprisoned for rapes they did not commit implicate a convicted rapist already serving three life terms for a 1984 rape.

Aaron Dooie III probably committed the rapes for which Arthur Lee Whitfield and Julius Earl Ruffin served a total of 43 years before being cleared, Commonwealth's Attorney John R. Doyle III said.

Doyle said Dooie will not be prosecuted for the rapes because in both cases key witnesses have died. Whitfield and Ruffin were convicted of rapes in Norfolk that occurred in 1981.



High-flyin' trick
Denny Howard of Carson City, Nev., performs a "Nolley Hand Flip" at the Mills Park skateboard park in Carson City.



Reflecting on school
Candidates for masters and doctoral degrees are reflected in a hallway mirror while preparing for fall commencement at Washington State University in Pullman, Wash.



Emu on the loose
Topeka police officers and Shawnee County sheriff's deputies try to catch an emu as it dashes across traffic at an intersection in Topeka, Kan. Unable to find the emu's owner, authorities found it a new home.



Making it festive? A skeleton in a Santa hat tries to set a holiday mood in the orthopedic-neurologic unit at the Benefits Healthcare hospital in Great Falls, Mont.



Bordering a touchdown U.S. Border Patrol agent Mark Bazili, center, runs past his blocker, agent Rick Sanchez, left, as he is chased by Alamogordo Department of Public Safety officer Richard Luna, right, during the annual Liniment Bowl at Griggs Complex in Alamogordo, N.M.



Skiing Santa Claus

Santa water skis on the Coosa River in Wetumpka, Ala., for the town's annual Christmas on the Coosa festival.

Botulism mystery

FL TALLAHASSEE — Tests to determine the source of the botulism toxin that left four people hospitalized were inconclusive, and it was unclear whether a cosmetic injection caused the paralyzing, potentially fatal illness, officials said.

Investigators suspect the four people, two in New Jersey and two in South Florida, may have been injected with the toxin for cosmetic reasons. All have been hospitalized since the Thanksgiving weekend.

Tests conducted at the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention in Atlanta detected botulism toxin type A in blood from three individuals. Specimens were not available for the fourth person.

Florida Health Secretary John Agwunobi noted that the toxin also causes the type of botulism that comes from eating contaminated foods or from having a wound contaminated.

Alcohol-related death

CO DENVER Colorado State University officials said a 20-year-old student whose body was found appears to be the latest in a string of alcohol-related deaths involving Colorado students this fall.

Bennett Bertoli's body was found in a house across the street from where he lived near the Fort Collins campus.

Police said they were called after attempts to wake him were unsuccessful.

Police did not release the cause of Bertoli's death, but Anne Hudgens, executive director of campus life, told the Fort Collins Coloradoan that it appeared to be alcohol-related. Police did not say how Bertoli ended up in the house.

Ex-con won't teach

NY CLINTON — A former leftist radical who spent 16 years in prison for possessing explosives has withdrawn from teaching a college seminar after his hiring sparked protests.

Susan Rosenberg made her decision because it was in the best interest of all parties, Hamilton College officials said.

In response to her hiring, prospective students withdrew applications and donors rescinded hundreds of thousands of dollars in pledges, school officials said.

Rosenberg, who earned a master's degree in creative writing while in prison, was to teach a one-month course in January called "Resistance Memoirs: Writing, Identity and Change." She was hired through an on-campus organization that focuses on social justice issues.

Algae researched

FL MARCO ISLAND — Scientists are tracking a 400 square-mile bloom of red tide algae lurking off the Gulf Coast, pointing to it as the likely cause of a mass fish kill and several dolphin deaths at the tip of the Florida peninsula.

"It looks almost the size of a small state. It really is a large area of bloom," said Billy Causey, superintendent of the Florida Keys National Marine Sanctuary. "I'd have to say that this is the largest red tide bloom that I have

ever seen."

A red tide is considered a higher-than-normal concentration of a plant-like microscopic algae. The species that usually contaminates the water during Florida Gulf Coast red tides is called *Gyrodinium aureolum*, which produces a toxin that can affect a fish's central nervous system.

Nude Statehouse lamp

VT MONTPELIER — Gov. James Douglas is doing some tidying up in his office and one thing he thinks can go is a table lamp that sometimes makes him red-faced.

The lamp, installed on his desk recently as part of a Statehouse restoration project, is a replica of a famous 19th century nude statue that cost \$2,500 and is plugged into an overhead chandelier.

"The governor does not object to the art," said Douglas spokesman Jason Gibbs. "It may, frankly, be awkward to explain why there is a nude Greek slave on the governor's desk to a third-grader."

Machete attack

TX TEXAS CITY — Police are looking for a man accused of attacking a woman with a machete, severing one of her fingers.

Rachael Ornelas was in stable condition at the University of Texas Medical Branch following surgery.

The 42-year-old woman had called emergency dispatchers, pleading for help, detective Brian Goetschius of the Texas City Police Department said. Emergency medical service workers and police found her covered in blood at her apartment.

Police recovered a large machete and issued a warrant for the arrest of a 40-year-old man.

New take on remedy

CA SAN FRANCISCO — Combating malaria has been one of the primary goals of the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, and its latest gift of \$42.6 million will fund a nonprofit drug company to high-tech take on an ancient Chinese remedy.

Working with a biotechnology company, the San Francisco-based Institute for One-World Health will try to combine genetic engineering efforts of Jay Keasling of the University of California, Berkeley into an inexpensive and effective drug to fight malaria in the third world.

Keasling is developing a new way to manufacture artemisinin, which is made from finely ground wormwood plants. Chinese first extracted artemisinin from the sweet wormwood for medicinal use more than 2,000 years ago.

Search for GOP leader

IL SPRINGFIELD — Illinois Republicans are searching for a new head of their party after GOP chairman Judy Barr Topinka gave them until Jan. 31 to find her replacement. Within the party, fierce ideological bickering has driven a wedge between conservatives and moderates. Democrats control both houses of the Legislature, the governor's mansion and the state Supreme Court.

Stories and photos from wire services

YOUR MONEY

Gift cards popular — but they can be tricky

BY EILEEN ALT POWELL
The Associated Press

NEW YORK — Publicist Scott Black started looking at purchasing gift cards a couple of years ago, when he realized how much it cost to ship holiday presents to customers and family.

"Whether for a client or my mother-in-law, it seemed silly to spend \$50 on a gift and then \$20 to ship it," said Black, 40, president of the Timepiece Public Relations agency in Dallas.

He's become a big fan of gift cards, which are prepaid cards that look like credit or debit cards that recipients can use to purchase goods or services. Black even sends them to his mother, who is an avid reader.

"I get gift cards to the book stores near her," he said. "For her, the hunt for a new book is as exciting as getting the gift."

The most popular gift cards are sold by retailers, including department stores, restaurants and music shops, for use in their own outlets. Others are available through financial institutions and generally carry the logos of Visa, MasterCard, American Express or Discover. These can be used wherever the branded credit cards are accepted.

Although increasingly popular with American consumers, gift cards are not in their drawbacks.

A study done by the Division of Consumer Affairs in Montgomery County, Md., found that some



Scott Black holds Barnes & Noble and Cheesecake Factory gift cards that he will be giving to friends and family as Christmas gifts. Black started looking seriously at purchasing gift cards a couple of years ago when he realized how much it was costing to ship presents to customers and family for the holidays.

gift card issuers do not offer replacement cards if the originals are lost or stolen.

Many extract "inactivity" or "dormancy" fees if a card isn't used within a year or other set period of time, reducing the value of the card by as much as \$2 a month. Some gift cards, especially bank-issued cards, cost \$3.95 to \$11.95 to buy and expire after a year or 18 months, the study found.

"Consumers should understand a gift card's policies before

they buy," the Maryland agency said.

Despite potential problems, the cards are gaining increasing consumer acceptance because they help make gift-giving easy, said Tara Weiner, national managing partner of consulting firm Deloitte & Touche USA's consumer business industries practice.

"Gift cards are convenient for the giver and convenient for the recipient, who can choose a gift they truly want," Weiner said.

A survey conducted for Deloitte

Before buying ...

The Treasury's Office of the Comptroller of the Currency and a number of state consumer agencies suggest consumers look into the terms and conditions on gift cards before they buy. Some things to look out for:

■ Is there a charge for purchase of the card? Gift cards issued by retailers generally don't have upfront costs, but bank cards that carry the logo of companies such as Visa, MasterCard, American Express and Visa can cost \$3.95 to \$11.95 to buy.

■ Does the card have an expiration date?

■ Are "inactivity" or "dormancy" fees deducted from the value of the gift card if it isn't used in a set period of time?

■ Are replacement cards available if a gift card is lost or stolen? Is there a charge for the replacement?

■ Exactly where can the cards be used? Can they be used on the Internet, or only for in-store purchases?

■ Can the cards be swapped for cash?

—The Associated Press

& Touche found that 64 percent of consumers intend to buy gift cards this holiday season, up from 60 percent in 2003. About half said they would purchase cards for stores or products, some 34 percent intend to buy cards for restaurants and 27 percent expect to buy cards for services.

But the Deloitte & Touche survey also found that more than a quarter of the people who received gift cards during the 2003 holiday season hadn't fully redeemed all of their gift cards a year later.

"You want the gift cards to be fully taken advantage of," Weiner said. "That suggests there's an opportunity for retailers to consider promotions around gift cards" after the holidays.

Ruth Furman, 38, of Las Vegas, used to avoid gift cards because she felt they were impersonal. Now she considers them the best way to make sure her eight nieces and nephews get exactly the gifts they want.

"I go out of my way to find out what they like, where they shop," Furman said. "I want the kids to

get something they're really going to like and they're really going to use."

That translates to Barnes & Noble and Borders gift cards for nieces who like to pick their own books and music, as well as a Toys R Us gift card for a 3-year-old nephew who likes Thomas the Tank Engine toys.

"I try to send the cards with a note, and that helps make it more personal," Furman said.

Still, there are consumers who don't want anything to do with gift cards.

"I just hate them," said Kathy Posner, 49, a retired advertising executive. Instead of putting gifts under the Christmas tree, "we're becoming a nation that puts envelopes under the tree," she said.

Posner said the holiday shops through the year, trying to match gifts to the wants and needs of friends and family.

"Prayer, I would rather have you spend \$10 and give me something you've thought about than spend \$50 and hand me a gift card that says to me, 'I don't have time to think about you,'" she said.

Scents and Sensibility
Money tip of the day

Start saving now

CBS MarketWatch
NEW YORK — Pennies for a rainy day are nice, but there are easy ways to save much more than that for a sunny future.

Glinda Bridgford and Gail Perry-Mann, authors of the new book "Girl, Make Your Money Grow!" warn consumers that for a sunny future, you'll find it easier to put aside. If the windfall is significant, try to put at least half into savings.

Cashing in on a windfall at the end of the day, put all your coin change into a mason jar or other container. When the container is full, count it up and bring it to your bank.

Serial savings. Decide that you'll save every \$1 bill with a serial number that begins with one of your initials or has a certain combination of numbers, such as the year in which were born. Check the serial numbers every time you break a large bill or receive change.

Windfall collection. Earmark for savings any financial windfall, such as cash gifts, refunds, prizes and even change you find on the street. Since you won't expect the money or counting on it to pay bills, you'll find it easier to put aside. If the windfall is significant, try to put at least half into savings.

Cashing in on change. At the end of the day, put all your coin change into a mason jar or other container. When the container is full, count it up and bring it to your bank.

Pay yourself. Make a list of your favorite stores and other places where you tend to spend money on unnecessary items. Whenever you visit those stores or outlets, put a percentage of the total purchase amount into savings.

TUESDAY'S MARKET SUMMARY

INDEXES					
High	Low	Net	%	YTD	52-wk
		Last	Chg	Chg	High
18,133.3	17,948.4	18,133.3	+18.9	+36	+22.1
3,146.86	2,743.46	3,146.86	+32.87	+48	+24.94
352.56	354.11	352.56	-1.55	-0.3	-0.3
7,108.81	6,171.85	7,108.81	+22.30	+31	+103.3
1,417.41	1,118.28	1,417.41	+30.13	+37	+19.86
2,164.62	1,759.82	2,164.62	+40.80	+53	+7.81
1,138.77	1,049.72	1,138.77	+89.05	+39	+82.3
548.29	549.29	548.29	-0.99	-0.1	-0.1
644.84	515.90	644.84	+128.94	+51	+86
117,379.70	10,598.52	117,379.70	+11,845.23	+47	+59.58

NYSE					
Most Active (\$1 or more)					
Name	Vol	Net	Chg	YTD	52-wk
Lucas	730.50	3.44	-0.07	-0.01	-0.01
General	620.40	25.18	+0.46	+0.02	+0.02
Pfizer	397.96	71.37	+1.17	+0.01	+0.01
Glaxo	262.73	37.18	+0.01	+0.01	+0.01
Merck	200.13	18.48	-0.39	-0.01	-0.01
Northwest	172.48	3.49	-0.09	-0.01	-0.01
Boeing	162.87	79.43	+0.01	+0.01	+0.01
Cyber	143.09	44.87	+0.33	+0.01	+0.01
Alcoa	147.11	1.37	-0.03	-0.01	-0.01

KEY DEFENSE STOCKS					
Name	Vol	Net	Chg	YTD	52-wk
Boeing	147.11	72.43	+0.51	+0.01	+0.01
Lockheed	147.11	72.43	+0.51	+0.01	+0.01
Northrop	147.11	72.43	+0.51	+0.01	+0.01
Raytheon	147.11	72.43	+0.51	+0.01	+0.01
General Dynamics	147.11	72.43	+0.51	+0.01	+0.01
Boeing	147.11	72.43	+0.51	+0.01	+0.01
Lockheed	147.11	72.43	+0.51	+0.01	+0.01
Northrop	147.11	72.43	+0.51	+0.01	+0.01
Raytheon	147.11	72.43	+0.51	+0.01	+0.01

KEY MUTUAL FUNDS					
Name	Vol	Net	Chg	YTD	52-wk
Fidelity Investor	35.32	-1.14	-0.04	-0.01	-0.01
Fidelity Investor	35.32	-1.14	-0.04	-0.01	-0.01
Fidelity Investor	35.32	-1.14	-0.04	-0.01	-0.01
Fidelity Investor	35.32	-1.14	-0.04	-0.01	-0.01
Fidelity Investor	35.32	-1.14	-0.04	-0.01	-0.01
Fidelity Investor	35.32	-1.14	-0.04	-0.01	-0.01
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Fidelity Investor	35.32	-1.14	-0.04	-0.01	-0.01

EXCHANGE RATES

Military rates					
Euro costs	\$1.3730				
Dollar costs	0.7283				
British pound	1.6129				
Japanese yen (Dec. 15)	102.00				
South Korean won (Dec. 15)	1,029.00				
Bahrain (Dinar)	0.4763				
British pound	1.6129				
Canada (Dollar)	1.2596				
Denmark (Krone)	6.46				
Egypt (Pound)	1.3307				
Hong Kong (Dollar)	0.7723				
Hungary (Forint)	13.2522				
Iceland (Krona)	105.40				
Israel (Sheqel)	4.8397				
Japan (Yen)	136.48				
Kuwait (Dinar)	0.29434				
Norway (Krone)	5.78				
Singapore (Dollar)	1.359				
Saudi Arabia (Riyal)	0.2661				
South Korea (Won)	1,088.13				
Switzerland (Franc)	1.06				
Thailand (Baht)	54.1				
Turkey (Lira)	1,419,000.00				

(Military exchange rates are those available to customers at military banking facilities in the country of issuance of the currency.)
 Netherlands and the United Kingdom.
 For national currency exchange rates, check with your local military banking facility. Commercial rates are inter-bank rates provided for reference when buying currency. All figures are foreign currencies to the dollar, except for the British pound, which is represented in dollars-to-pound, and the euro, which is dollars-to-euro.)

PRECIOUS METALS					
Gold	\$440.53				
Silver	\$6.88				
Palladium	\$1,111.11				
Platinum	\$911.11				
Rhodium	\$1,111.11				
Iridium	\$1,111.11				
Ruthenium	\$1,111.11				
Technetium	\$1,111.11				
Yttrium	\$1,111.11				
Zinc	\$1,111.11				

INTEREST RATES					
Prime rate	5.25				
Discount rate	5.25				
Federal funds market rate	5.25				
3-month bill	2.23				
6-month bill	2.23				
1-year bill	2.23				
Source: The Associated Press, Bank of America					

Stripes Travel

For a treat, try Lithuania

Baltic nation awakens after communism

By KAREN TORME OLSON

Chicago Tribune

For most Americans, this newly admitted member of the European Union is unknown territory. But for thousands of descendants of Lithuanian emigrants who come back each year looking for their roots, Lithuania and its people quickly become familiar.

Now I'm one of them.

In 1865, my Lithuanian great-grandfather left his family and friends at 16 to find a better life in America. He died in 1932 after a successful life as a farmer and store owner.

I knew him only through family stories, but when I was offered a summer teaching opportunity in Lithuania through Snowball, an Illinois-based prevention organization for teens, I signed up for a chance to learn a little more about my roots.

The adventure began at the Skrydis Vesbutis, a hotel with a distinct Soviet-era feel near the airport in the capital city of Vilnius. Despite spotty improvements (decent water pressure, phones in all rooms), the "senior" desks at the end of each hall and the staff's by-the-book guest relations imparted a barracks aura. But at 120 litas a night (about \$44) for a single, the price was right.

From there, I'd arranged to take a side trip with Jack Irwin, a Snowball leader from Geneva, Ill., who'd spent considerable time in this Baltic country of almost 4 million people. Then we'd rejoin the group and explore Vilnius before leaving for Snowball camp in the extreme southern part of the country.

We started with a fast-paced walking tour of some of the more than two dozen churches in the city center. We visited the extravagant Church of St. Anne, which so impressed Napoleon that he expressed the desire to take it back to Paris, and the imposing Vilnius Cathedral and its ornate St. Casimir chapel. The cathedral sits on Cathedral Square, a



Chicago Tribune

The imposing Vilnius Cathedral, in Lithuania's capital, sits on Cathedral Square, a large open space paved with stones from the wall that once surrounded the city and site of a huge monument to the city's founder, Grand Duke Gediminas.

large open space paved with stones from the wall that once surrounded the city and site of a huge monument to the city's founder, Grand Duke Gediminas.

The ever-present sounds of construction reminded us that Lithuania's fast-growing, post-independence (1991) economy has turned Vilnius into one big renovation project of hotels, gleaming shopping malls and rehabbed living spaces.

We browsed among the street vendors' wares of woodcarvings, local art and amber jewelry. Then it was off to dinner at Bella-montas, an ambitious riverside restaurant-park-playground-dance hall-cinema complex set

against a backdrop of krikolai (waterfalls) and gardens connected by cobblestone paths. We shared bread (a battered, fried snack oozing with garlic) and banana-stuffed blinis. Bananas are popular ingredients in local dishes, Jack explained, because the tropical fruit had been banned as a punishment for Lithuania's resistance to the Soviet regime. Now that bananas are available, they are unofficially regarded as an edible solidarity symbol.

The next morning, Jack and I headed for Kaunas, Lithuania's second-largest city, about 50 miles west of Vilnius. Like many Eastern European cities, Kaunas has a quaint Old Town with quiet



The barracks inside the beautiful, 500-year-old Trakai Castle in Lithuania have been transformed into a museum and shops for tourists.

streets, churches, a castle, shops and cafes.

We ended our walking tour of Kaunas on Laisves Aleja (Freedom Avenue), a milelong pedestrian boulevard lined with restaurants, bars and such specialty European retailers as L'Occitane and Bennetton. The silver-domed Church of St. Michael the Archangel looms over Independence Square at the eastern end of the boulevard. St. Michael's dates to 1893 as a place of worship for Russian Orthodox troops stationed nearby. Used by the Soviets as a museum during their occupation, St. Michael's became a Roman Catholic Church in 1990.

The guidebooks say that Kaunas is a city of museums: The Devil Museum and its collection of more than 2,000 mostly comical representations of Satan, the MK Churlionis Art Museum and the popular Lithuanian Open Air Museum all are there.

But the most moving exhibit in the area is the Ninth Fort complex on the edge of town. It is a cluster of three sites: a small building filled with artifacts, jail cells where Jews were confined before being executed and a huge, jagged concrete monument. These structures stand where tens of thousands of Jews (as well as Lithuanians and Poles) were murdered during World War II — not in a gas chamber, but by handguns — in just three years (1941-1944), virtually wiping out Lithuania's Jewish population.

After paying our respects, we hit the highway for the bustling port town of Klaipeda.

Most of Lithuania is flat farm country, making the 125-mile trip akin to a drive across Kansas, except for the patches of dense forest. All along the way, people were selling baskets of just-picked wild mushrooms and freshly gathered berries. Then there were the storks in their huge nests atop telephone poles and chimneys. Lithuanians believe it is good luck for a stork to build a nest on their property, so they let them stay.

Eventually, the Baltic Sea appeared beyond a cluster of construction cranes in the Klaipeda shipyard. We drove to the Hotel Klaipeda, a former economy-class holdover from the Soviet days. However, the tenement-style tower had been renovated and now had a slick lobby and amenities that included a fitness center, restaurants, a rooftop bar with a view of the harbor and city, and well-appointed rooms with satellite TV.

The 280-lit (510) tab for a single wasn't expected, but I was thrilled to get my hands on a hairdryer.

Klaipeda is Lithuania's third-largest city and the only northern port on the eastern coast of the Baltic that does not freeze, boosting its commercial and strategic importance. The city boasts a full schedule of festivals, a host of historical structures and a university, but that wasn't why we were there.

Our main reason for this stop was the 10-minute ferry ride across the Curonian Lagoon to the Curonian Spit, a narrow,

SEE LITHUANIA, PAGE 24

LITHUANIA, FROM PAGE 23

60-mile peninsula included on the UNESCO World Heritage list as a cultural landscape site.

Various countries have coveted — and controlled — the Curonian Spit for centuries. Lithuania currently has jurisdiction over the northern half, while Russia administers the rest.

Lithuania's portion, known as Neringa, includes a national forest, sandy beaches, harbors, bicycle trails, shifting dunes, an open-air collection of giant oak sculptures on Wittches' Hill in the village of Juodkrante and the fishing village-turned-resort town of Nida. The ferry between Klaipeda and Smiltynė on the northern tip of the spit runs every 30 minutes. Our was packed with bikers, bikers and motorists heading for a day at the beach. We immediately headed for Nida, the largest and most-visited village on the peninsula.

Besides galleries, churches, dunes and beaches, the attractions include the Urbs Hill lighthouse, restored in the 1950s after being blown up during World War II; a hilltop monument to Nida's Gliding School; the Nida Ethnographic Cemetery and its 12th-century carved wooden gravestones; and Thomas Mann's Memorial Museum, once the Nobel laureate's summer home.

Before heading back to the mainland, we stopped for lunch near the shoreline and watched vacationers walking, biking and running along the paths that skirt the water, some carrying packages of smoked fish, which is sold in kiosks along the beach.

While the villages of Neringa municipality offer a rustic experience, it is Palanga, just 17 miles north of Klaipeda, that is the primo Lithuanian seaside playground. It draws tens of thousands of visitors a year to its white sandy beaches, botanical park, public sculpture garden and amber museum. For us, however, Palanga was a disappointment. We had hoped to see the dunes and the nearby Hill of Crosses.



A sculpture outside the Lithuanian National Drama Theater in Vilnius, the capital of Lithuania, evokes a sense of eerie drama itself.

The hill is about 8 miles north-east of Siauliai on farm roads that are well-marked — a good thing because the hill is in the middle of a field. It's difficult to describe the impact made by the sight of thousands of crosses in a huge range of sizes next to, on top of and hanging on each other.

There are several legends about the origins of the Hill of Crosses, but the most frequently cited says the hill originated as a spontaneous memorial to insurgents killed in a 19th-century rebellion.

In the 1950s Lithuanians began putting up crosses in memory of loved ones who had died in exile in Siberian concentration camps. Several times thereafter, the Soviets bulldozed the hill and its offending symbols, but the crosses always reappeared. Since Lithuania's independence in 1991, the hill has grown daily, spilling off the mound and onto the meadow below. It has become a site of pilgrimages and a symbol of Lithuanians' belief in God.

The hill was our last stop on this road trip before we drove back to Vilnius. During the next two days we explored the city and environs with a passion.

We walked through the Gates of Dawn, and saw elderly men and women struggling up worn marble steps to pray in the chapel at the top.

We read the names of the Lithuanian patriots inscribed on the walls of the creepy KGB museum, and sampled beaver stew and blueberry dumplings at Lokys, one of Vilnius' oldest restaurants.

We drove to the town of Trakai to explore its 15th-century castle on a lake, and bought dozens of cookies, bags of cherries and amber jewelry in the shadow of the red-stone edifice.

We visited a weekend cot-

tage on farmland outside of town, and shared a meal lovingly prepared by Lithuanian teen leaders.

We scored a discount store called Hyper Maxi for bargain soups, and sipped beet soup ("salibarsciai") in a Planet Hollywood-type restaurant.

We bought hand-carved wooden statues of Lithuania's "sad" Jesus from a folk artist and amber-crusted Christmas tree ornaments from an upscale shop in the Gorky Corner on Stiklial Street.

Then it was time to go to work at the Snowball seminar, where 40 teens were waiting for us near Druskininkai. But after a week of riding herd on rambunctious teenagers, cabin fever set in. Three teachers and I played hooky for an afternoon of cruises-

ing the countryside in a borrowed stick-shift van.

Our first stop was the hamlet of Grutas, where we walked slack-jawed through Gruto Park, a surreal sculpture garden whose major attractions are enormous recycled statues depicting the scions of Communism. The statues had graced almost every town square before being torn down and hauled away after the breakup of the Soviet Union. We left humming the socialist marching songs that blared from speakers hidden in the trees.

Next was Druskininkai, a resort town on the Nemunas River that's famed for a spa that offers mud baths, massages and healing spring waters.

On the way back to camp and our first session in the snowplow, our truncky in stalled traffic near the tiny town of Varena. Police had halted movement on our side of the highway to let hundreds of singing pilgrims pass on the way from Poland to attend a mass celebrating the 60th anniversary of the supposedly miraculous Mother of Mercy portrait at the Gates of Dawn in Vilnius.

In the morning, our driver arrived in his well worn but immaculate family van. Audrone explained that this wizened man dressed in worn clothes was a friend of our family who had taken the job to earn a few extra litas. During the 90-minute drive back to Vilnius he proudly called our attention to landmarks, trying to explain their history in broken English that was far better than our Lithuanian.

On the surface, he was an unremarkable man, but his values clearly reflected determination to complete even the most menial task with dignity. Watching him, it occurred to me that this man epitomized the fabric of Lithuania's soul — proud, gallant, hard-working and independent.

I hadn't had enough information to find my great-grandfather's hometown, but I think I found the source of his spirit.

Find Lithuania's official travel Web site at www.travel.lt.

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Jan 16 Motorcoach tour of Ireland
Jan 18 Venice • Venice • Trieste • Dolomites
Jan 23 Czech • Moravia • Prague • Slovakia
Jan 30 Norway • Visit old Maastricht • Amsterdam
Feb 6 Toledo, Spain • San Geronimo • Gascogne
Feb 13 Carnival in Mexico • Go to a hike: Italy
Feb 20 Whiskey trail • Germany • France
Feb 27 London • London • London
Mar 6 Southampton • Southampton • London
Mar 13 Ireland • Amsterdam • Edinburgh
Mar 20 St. Petersburg • Italian Riviera • France
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STARS AND STRIPES.

Jan 19 Running of the bulls • San Fermín • Bullfighting
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June 10 Medieval fairs • Germany • Ireland • England
June 17 Germany • Prague • Belgian beer • San Fermín
June 24 Spain • Montserrat • Barcelona • Catalonia
July 1 Spain • Montserrat • Barcelona • Catalonia
July 8 Germany • Prague • Belgian beer • San Fermín
July 15 London • London • London
July 22 London • London • London
July 29 Highland • Scotland • Scotland
Aug 5 Athens • Sargento • Western island of the
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Christmas markets

COMPILED BY
KAREN BRADBURY

Stars and Stripes

This list has been compiled from information from tourist offices and Web sites. It is as accurate as possible given information available at press time. Next week, the remaining Christmas markets will be included in the regular Calendar.

AUSTRIA

www.austria-tourism.at

BURGENLAND REGION

Breitenbrunn: Dec. 17-19.

Eisenstadt: through Dec. 24.

CARINTHIA REGION

Gmünd: through Dec. 24.

Klagenfurt: through Dec. 24.

Spittal: through Dec. 24.

Velden: through Dec. 21.

Villach: through Dec. 24.

UPPER AUSTRIA REGION

Linz: through Dec. 24.

Steyr: Advent weekends.

Unterweissenbach: Advent week-ends.

Wolfgangsee: through Dec. 19.

SALZBURG REGION

Obertauern: through Dec. 31.

Koppl-Guggenthal: Dec. 18-Dec. 19.

Salzburg: through Dec. 24.
Salzburg city center and Mirabell Square.

St. Leonhard near Grödig: Dec. 18-Dec. 19.

STYRIA

Aflenz-Resort Area: through Dec. 24.

Graz: through Dec. 24.

Kornberg Castle-Feldbach: through Dec. 23.

Mariazell: through Dec. 19.

TIROL

Hall in Tirol: through Dec. 24.

Imst: through Dec. 23.

Innsbruck: Dec. 19-24.

Kufstein: Advent weekends.

Mayrhofen: Dec. 17-19.

Plangeroß St. Leonhard: through Dec. 24.

Rattenberg: Dec. 18.

Seefeld: through Dec. 24.

VORARLBERG REGION

Dornbirn: through Dec. 23.

Feldkirch: through Dec. 24.

Schwarzenberg: through Dec. 19.

VIENNA

Freyung: through Dec. 23.

Spittelberg: through Dec. 23.

Schönbrunn: through Dec. 26.

Vienna Rathaus Park: through Dec. 24.

BELGIUM

www.visitbelgium.com

Antwerp: through Dec. 23.

Brussels: Marche aux Poissons and Place St. Catherine, through Jan. 2.

Bruges: through Jan. 2.

Ghent: through Dec. 19.

Liege: through Dec. 30.

Mechelen: Dec. 17-19.

Tubize: through Dec. 19.



MICHAEL ABRAMS/Stars and Stripes

Large Christmas ornaments dangle at the Heidelberg, Germany, Christmas market. The market takes place on three city squares.

CZECH REPUBLIC

www.czechtourism.com

Prague: through Jan. 6.

DENMARK

www.visitdenmark.com

Copenhagen: Tivoli amusement park, through Dec. 23.

Horsens: through Dec. 23.

Århus: Christmas in Old Town and Christmas market, through Dec. 23.

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Strasbourg: through Dec. 31.
Toulouse: through December.
Troyes: through Dec. 31.

GERMANY

www.germany-tourism.de

Aachen: through Dec. 20.

Amberg: through Dec. 23.

Annaberg: through Dec. 19.

Ansbach: through Dec. 24.

Afshaffenburg: through Dec. 22.

Augsburg: through Dec. 24.

Baden-Baden: through Dec. 21.

Bad Mergentheim: Dec. 16-19.

Bad Tölz: through Dec. 24.

Bamberg: through Dec. 23.

Bayreuth: through Dec. 23.

Berlin: Markets: throughout the city, including:

Charlottenburg-Wilmersdorf: through Dec. 26.

Marzahn-Hellersdorf: through Dec. 24.

Mitte: through Dec. 24.

Pankow: through Dec. 18.

Reinickendorf: through Dec. 24.

Spandau: through Dec. 23.

Treptow-Köpenick: through Dec. 19.

Bernkastel-Kues: through Dec. 22.

Bonn: through Dec. 23.

Braunschweig: through Dec. 28.

Bremen: through Dec. 23.

Chemnitz: through Dec. 21.

Cochern: through Dec. 19.

Cologne: Markets: throughout the city, including:

Rheinpromenade: through Dec. 21.

Medieval market at the Chocolate Museum: through Dec. 23.

By cathedral: through Dec. 23.

Darmstadt: through Dec. 23.

Deidesheim: Dec. 17-19.

Dinkelsbühl: through Dec. 21.

Dortmund: through Dec. 23.

Dresden: through Dec. 24.

Düsseldorf: through Dec. 23.

Erfurt: through Dec. 22.

Essen: through Dec. 23.

Esslingen: through Dec. 22.

Feuchtwangen: through Dec. 18.

Frankfurt: through Dec. 22.

Freiburg im Breisgau: through Dec. 23.

Fulda: through Dec. 20.

Gießen: through Dec. 20.

Hamburg: through Dec. 23.

Hanau: through Dec. 22.

Heidelberg: through Dec. 22.

Heilbronn: through Dec. 22.

Kaiserslautern: through Dec. 22.

Karlsruhe: through Dec. 23.

Kirchheim unter Teck: through Dec. 19.

Koblenz: through Dec. 22.

Ladenburg: Dec. 17-19.

Leipzig: through Dec. 22.

Ludwigsburg: through Dec. 20.

Magdeburg: through Dec. 23.

Mainz: through Dec. 23.

Mannheim: through Dec. 22.

Memmingen: through Dec. 22.

Michelstadt: through Dec. 19.

München: through Dec. 24.

markets throughout the city.

Nördlingen: through Dec. 23.

Nürnberg: through Dec. 24.

Regensburg an der Donau: through Dec. 23.

Reutlingen: through Dec. 19.

Rosenheim: through Dec. 23.

Rostock: through Dec. 23.

Rothenburg ob der Tauber: through Dec. 22.

Rüdesheim am Rhein: through Dec. 19.

Saarbrücken: through Dec. 19.

Schneifurt: through Dec. 22.

Speyer: through Dec. 22.

Straubing an der Donau: through Dec. 23.

Stuttgart: through Dec. 23.

Tauberbischofsheim: through Dec. 19.

Trier: through Dec. 22.

Ulm: through Dec. 22.

Wiesbaden: through Dec. 23.

Wolfsbühl: through Dec. 22.

Würzburg: through Dec. 23.

Italy: Markets: throughout the city, including:

Charlottenburg-Wilmersdorf: through Dec. 26.

Marzahn-Hellersdorf: through Dec. 24.

Mitte: through Dec. 24.

Pankow: through Dec. 18.

Reinickendorf: through Dec. 24.

Spandau: through Dec. 23.

Treptow-Köpenick: through Dec. 19.

Bernkastel-Kues: through Dec. 22.

Bonn: through Dec. 23.

Braunschweig: through Dec. 28.

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Essen: through Dec. 23.

Esslingen: through Dec. 22.

Feuchtwangen: through Dec. 18.

Frankfurt: through Dec. 22.

Freiburg im Breisgau: through Dec. 23.

Fulda: through Dec. 20.

Gießen: through Dec. 20.

Hamburg: through Dec. 23.

Hanau: through Dec. 22.

Heidelberg: through Dec. 22.

Heilbronn: through Dec. 22.

Kaiserslautern: through Dec. 22.

Karlsruhe: through Dec. 23.

Kirchheim unter Teck: through Dec. 19.

Koblenz: through Dec. 22.

Ladenburg: Dec. 17-19.

Leipzig: through Dec. 22.

Ludwigsburg: through Dec. 20.

Magdeburg: through Dec. 23.

Mainz: through Dec. 23.

Mannheim: through Dec. 22.

Memmingen: through Dec. 22.

Michelstadt: through Dec. 19.

München: through Dec. 24.

Nürnberg: through Dec. 24.

Regensburg an der Donau: through Dec. 23.

Reutlingen: through Dec. 19.

Rosenheim: through Dec. 23.

Rostock: through Dec. 23.

Rothenburg ob der Tauber: through Dec. 22.

Rüdesheim am Rhein: through Dec. 19.

Saarbrücken: through Dec. 19.

Schneifurt: through Dec. 22.

Speyer: through Dec. 22.

Straubing an der Donau: through Dec. 23.

Stuttgart: through Dec. 23.

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AP photos
Skaters say
the ice rink
adds a
magical
dimension to
seeing the
breathtaking
views from
the French
capital's
best-known
landmark.



Ice skating in the sky

Famed Eiffel Tower opens rink 188 feet above ground

BY JOCELYN GECKER

The Associated Press

Holiday on ice takes on new meaning when you're high above the rooftops of Paris doing figure eights inside the Eiffel Tower.

During the 115 years of the Eiffel Tower's existence, it has added refreshment stands, trinket shops and fancy restaurants — but nothing quite matches the skating rink in the sky that opened to the public this month.

On an observation deck 188 feet above ground, the ice rink adds a new dimension to the breathtaking views from the French capital's best-known landmark.

"It's just magical. You see the whole city differently," said Finnish visitor Hanna Patila, 20, who donated a Santa Claus hat and braved a chilly winter morning to be among the first on the ice.

"What a nice touch for the holidays," she said, the city of Paris at her feet. "It's like you're skating on air."

Lodged between two of the tower's immense latticed steel legs, the rectangular rink is a little larger than a tennis court. It holds 80 skaters at once — half the capacity of New York City's Rockefeller Center rink.

Few visitors seemed bothered by the rink's intimacy.

"I've never put on ice skates in my life. But this, I couldn't resist," said Swiss tourist Cecile Giacomotti, slowly skating

hand-in-hand with her husband, Olivier, who summed up the ambience in one word: "Fabuleux!"

Part of the idea behind the high-rise rink is to boost interest in Paris' candidacy for the 2012 Summer Olympics. Banner's plugging the bid ring the guard rail, and the centerpiece of the rink is emblazoned with the motto: "Paris 2012."

The company that runs the Eiffel Tower also hopes the skating rink will attract more French people to the monument, where most visitors now are tourists from overseas. The rink is open everyday from 9:30 a.m. to 11:30 p.m. through Jan. 23.

If opening day was any indication, the French are as keen as foreigners. Admission and skate rentals are free after paying the Eiffel Tower's entry fee. It costs \$5.30 for adults and \$3 for children to reach the tower's first level, where the rink is located.

Didier Daigremont, owner of a Paris real-estate agency, closed the office and brought 15 of his employees to skate.

"I wanted to give them a little Christmas present," said Daigremont, 53, pausing to appreciate a bird's-eye view of the golden dome of Invalides, the burial place of Napoleon, surrounded by a carpet of Paris rooftops and monuments.

Gustave Eiffel probably didn't have a rink in mind when he designed the 1,069-foot tower over a century ago. Then again, the tower, which was built for the 1889 World's Fair, wasn't

supposed to survive this long.

"He expected it would be torn down. He never thought it would become the symbol of Paris," said Eiffel's great-grandson, Edouard Couperie, one of the guests at a private inauguration of the rink.

Waiters in chefs' toques served petits fours for the inaugural party as guests bundled in winter wear sipped champagne. Guests were treated to a show by professional figure skaters.

What might Eiffel have thought of all this?

"He was a visionary, so I think he could have imagined this," said Couperie, watching skaters. "It's quite extraordinary."

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Prattville PX, Camp Balmor PX, Eagle Base PX, Incline PX, Qatar PX,
Algeria PX, Arflex 2 PX.

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A bird's-eye-view of the rink from higher levels in the famed tower.



A statue of an angel gazes heavenward in front of the cathedral in Avignon, France.



The St. Bénézet bridge in Avignon, made famous by the song "Sur le Pont d'Avignon..." as seen from the river, but now only a few arches reach out over the Rhone. The bank at top is not the other side, but an island.

A city, a bridge and a

Avignon, France, boasts 2 claims to fame

BY MICHAEL ABRAMS

Stars and Stripes

Although the history of Avignon, France, dates to medieval times, and despite its medieval walls and churches, cafés and shop-lined streets, this French city on the Rhone River is best known for two things: popes and a song about a bridge.

In the 14th century, security and the quality of life in Rome had deteriorated so far that Pope Clement V, who was French-born, moved back to France. His successor, John XXII, made Avignon the seat of the Holy See in 1316. From then until 1378, the popes lived in Avignon.

When Urban VI moved back to Rome, the French cardinals elected Clement VII as pope in Avignon, creating what is known as "the Great Schism." Needless to say, with a pope in Rome, and the anti-popes in Avignon, the Catholic Church was in great turmoil, one that lasted until 1417.

If the Great Schism was bad for the church, having popes in Avignon was a good thing for the city. With them came influence, commerce and a great deal of construction.

One of their lasting contributions to the city is the Palais des Papes, or Popes' Palace. This huge building towers above the city with a commanding view of the Rhone River valley and the surrounding countryside. Built between 1334 and 1352, the palace is a maze of rooms, corridors and staircases. It is actually two connected buildings, the Palais Vieux (old) and the Palais Neuf (new) each surrounding a courtyard.

The best way to see the palace is on a tour. Luckily an audio guide is available, one of those things that look like a telephone that visitors carry so they can see the sights at their own pace.

Unfortunately you can't take photos inside. Be sure to go up to the Terrasse des Grands Dignitaires. From there you have a great view over the city and much of the palace and the Place du Palais square with the former mint, now the music conservatory, and the Petit Palais art museum.

Next door to the palace is the 12th-century Notre-Dame des Doms cathedral, with its bell-tower topped by a statue of the Virgin Mary.

Beyond the cathedral is the Rocher des Doms, a garden built on a terraced bluff with a fantastic view

overlooking the countryside, the river and the Pont St. Bénézet below.

According to legend, in 1177, a young shepherd named Bénézet heard voices from heaven commanding him to build a bridge across the Rhone, at a spot indicated by angel. A magnificent bridge was built, spanning two arms of the river, 2,953 feet long and supported by 22 arches.

On the bridge stands the Chapelle St. Nicolas, dedicated to the patron saint of boatmen.

Through the years, the bridge, now known as Pont St. Bénézet, was torn apart by floods and rebuilt until finally most of it was destroyed in the mid-17th century. Today, only three arches remain.

Perhaps the bridge would have sunk into obscurity, were it not for the song about people dancing in circles on the bridge. It is a song that many people studying French, and most schoolchildren in France learn:

"Sur le pont d'Avignon,
l'on y danse, l'on y danse,
sur le pont d'Avignon,
l'on y danse tout en rond..."

E-mail Michael Abrams at:
abrams@mail.estripes.osd.mil.



People cross the famous bridge in Avignon. The Notre-Dame-des-Doms cathedral and the Palais des Papes tower above in the background.

The
squ



PHOTOS BY MICHAEL ABRAMS/Stars and Stripes

ve Rocher des Doms garden. The bridge dates to the 12th century and was 2,953 feet long and had 22 arches, in the middle of the river.



A statue of a bound Christ in the Notre-Dames-des-Doms cathedral.

heavenly connection



Palais des Papes in Avignon. At far left is the Notre-Dame-des-Doms cathedral. The café on the palace is a popular place to cool the feet after a tour of the papal palace.

If you go

Where: Avignon is in southern France, just off Autoroute A7 between Lyon and Marseille.

When: Anytime. The Palais des Papes is open 9:30 a.m. to 5:30 p.m. November to mid-March; 9 a.m. to 7 p.m. mid-March to June and October; from 9 a.m. to 8 p.m. and from July to September from 9 a.m. to 8 p.m.

The Pont St. Bénézet has the same hours.

Admission: Entrance to the Palais des Papes costs 7.50 euros for adults and 3 euros for children from Nov. 1 to March 14; and 9.50 for adults and 4 euros for children from March 15 to Oct. 31.

Pont St. Bénézet costs 3.50 euros for adults and 2 euros for children from Nov. 1 to March 14, and 4 euros for adults and 3 euros for children March 15 to Oct. 31. Children under 8 go free.

There is a combined ticket for the palace and bridge. It is 9.50 euros for adults and 4.50 for children from Nov. 1 to March 14, and 11.50 and 5.50 respectively the rest of the year.

More information: There is more to see and do in Avignon. Check it out on the city's Web site: www.avignon.fr/en. The Palais des Papes site is www.palais-des-papes.com/anglais/index.html.



Stars and Stripes

— MICHAEL ABRAMS

Ski Clubs & Events

COMPILED BY

KAREN BRADY

Stars and Stripes

This column lists contacts for ski clubs and other organizations that offer ski trips, and provides updated schedules of events.

The fastest way to add, correct or update a listing is to send information by e-mail to: travel@earthlink.net, estripes.ord.mil. You also may fax it to: +49, 0 6155- 601-416. If you have questions, please call, +49, 0 6155-601-380.

ITALY

AVIANO SKI CLUB

Area: Northern Italy

President: Mark Fix

Web site: www.avianoskiclub.com

Telephone 0434 366 185 (Gloria Leonarduzzi, vice president)

Membership fees: \$15 adults, \$5 children 7-17, free for children under 6.

Trips: Dec. 18-22, Bad Moos, \$185; Dec. 26-Jan. 1, St. Veit, Austria, \$425; Jan. 14-17, Madonna di Campiglio, Italy, \$225; Jan. 28-30, Sella Ronda and Arabba, \$150; Feb. 12-19, Sestriere, Italy, \$695; Feb. 19-21, Lake Bled, Slovenia, \$190; March 11-13, Molltaler Glacier, Austria, \$120.

GERMANY

FRANKFURT INTERNATIONAL SKI CLUB

President: Rob Pinnington

Telephone: 069-9720-3669

E-mail: info@fiscweb.org

Web site: www.fiscweb.org

Address: c/o Trevor Wolf, CMR 453, Box 939, APO AE 09074; or c/o Rob Pinnington, Im Sichel 2, 61273 Wehrheim, Germany

Membership fees: 20 euros for singles, 30 euros for families.

Meetings: 7 p.m. every other Wednesday at The Fox and The Fiddler's Pub and Music Hall, Bleichstrasse 46, Frankfurt.

Trips: Dec. 26-Jan. 1, St. Veit I, Austria, 395 euros; Dec. 29-Jan. 2, Interlaken/Jungfrau, Switzerland, 395 euros; Jan. 7-9, Kitzbühel, Austria, 220 euros; Jan. 14-16, Alpe Schöneberg, Switzerland, 185 euros; Jan. 14-17, St. Anton I, Austria, 275 euros; Jan. 21-23, Davos, Switzerland, 285 euros; Jan. 28-30, Jungfrau, Switzerland, 295 euros; Jan. 29, Schwarzwald, Germany, 40 euros; Feb. 4-8, Champoluc, Italy, 425 euros; Feb. 4-6, Aledorfer, Switzerland, 255 euros; Feb. 11-13, Villars, Switzerland, 245 euros; Feb. 12-19, St. Veit II, Austria, 380 euros; Feb. 18-20, Verbier, Switzerland, 195 euros; Feb. 18-21, Crans-Montana, 265 euros; Feb. 25-27, Zell am See, Austria, 200 euros; Feb. 26-March 5, Banff, Canada, 780 euros; March 4-6, Disentis/Sedrun, Switzerland, 185 euros; March 10-13, Chamonix, France, 295 euros; March 11-13, Laax/Flims/Falera, Switzerland, 295 euros; March 18-20, Klosters, Switzerland, 255 euros; March 24-28, St. Moritz, Switzerland, 340 euros; March



Photo courtesy Grafenwöhr Ski Club

Frank Minnie of AFN Bavaria checks snow conditions during a day on the slopes at St. Veit, Austria, with the Grafenwöhr Ski Club earlier this season. Do you have good-quality, active shots of your club or group skiing or relaxing après-ski? To have them considered for use in the Ski Clubs & Events calendar, please send them (min. 800 dpi, include names of people and location) to travel@earthlink.net.

26-April 2, Val Thorens, France, 485 euros; April 1-3, St. Anton, Austria, 205 euros; April 8-10, Lech, Austria, 205 euros; April 14-17, Zermatt, Switzerland, 295 euros; April 28-May 1, Ischgl, Austria, 270 euros; June 16-19, Chiemsee Adventure, Germany, 285 euros; July 1-4, Sächsische Schweiz, Germany, 285 euros. These are first sign-up prices; prices then increase by 10 euros. Airfare not included in price of Banff trip.

GRAFENWÖHR SKI AND SNOWBOARDING CLUB

Area: Grafenwöhr/Vilseck

President: Tony Neaverth

Telephone: DSN 476-1560, or civilian 0964-1831560

E-mail: anthony.neaverth@us.army.mil or GRAFWSKI@hotmail.com

Membership fees: \$20 or 15 euros

Meetings: 7 p.m. on first and third Thursday of each month in Italian Restaurant Da Lino in Grafenwöhr.

Trips: Jan. 13-15, St. Johann, Austria, price TBA; Feb. 17-25, Dolomites Kronplatz, Italy, price TBA; March 18-20, Zell am See, Austria, price TBA.

HEIDELBERG INTERNATIONAL SKI CLUB

Area: Heidelberg

President: Marco Valpando

Telephone: 06202-577-8422 or 06221-57-5352, or DSN 70-5352

E-mail: president@heidelbergski.com

Web site: www.heidelbergski.com

Address: CMR 419 Box 1909,

APO AE 09102 or Postfach 105743, 69115 Heidelberg

Membership fees: \$30 for adults.

Meetings: 7 p.m. every other Wednesday at Hotel Zagreb in Schwetzingen.

Trips: Dec. 18-24/25-26, Arabba, Italy, 460-610 euros; Dec. 23-26, Zermatt, Switzerland, 425 euros; Jan. 9-15, St. Veit, Austria, 380 euros; Jan. 14-17, Portes du Soleil, France, 275 euros; Jan. 14-17, Saas Fee, Switzerland, 230 euros; Jan. 28-30, Wengen, Switzerland, 225 euros; Feb. 4-6, Kitzbühel, Austria, 235 euros; Feb. 11-13, Crans Montana, Switzerland, 290 euros; Feb. 18-21, Bad Hofgastein, Austria, 325; Feb. 18-21, Flims Laax, Switzerland, 225 euros; Feb. 20-26, St. Veit I, Austria, 400 euros; March 4-6, Zell am See, 190 euros; March 18-20, Davos/Klosters, 245 euros; March 26-29, Tignes, France, 765 euros; April 1-3, Engelberg, Switzerland, 285 euros; April 8-10, Arberg, 210 euros; April 9-16, Val Thorens (200-340 euros); April 29-May 1, Ischgl (220 euros); May 27-30, Badense (290 euros).

KAISERSLAUTERN SKI CLUB

Area: Kaiserslautern Military Community

President: Bob Carper

Telephone: 06303-4751

E-mail: carperb@msn.com

Web site: http://www.geocities.com/k_townskiclub/

Address: Bob Carper, PSC 10, Box 825, APO AE 09142

Meetings: 7 p.m. on first and third Wednesday of the month in Kazabura Club, Vogelweh.

Trips: Dec. 19-25, St. Veit I, Austria, 400 euros; Dec. 26-Jan. 1, St. Veit I, Austria, 400 euros; Jan. 14-17, Davos, Switzerland, 315 euros; Jan. 28-30, Wilde Kaiser, Austria, 145 euros; Feb. 11-13, Serfaus, Austria, 185 euros; Feb. 17-21, Chamonix, France, 430 euros; Feb. 26-March 5, Trois Vallées, France, 480 euros; March 18-20, Lenzerheide, Switzerland, 210 euros; April 1-3, Verbier, Switzerland, 150 euros; April 22-24, Lech, Austria, 215 euros. A non-refundable 50-euro deposit required for all trip sign-ups.

MANNHEIM INTERNATIONAL SKI CLUB

Area: Mannheim

President: Roseann Drydale

Contact: Janet-Anne Boykin

Telephone: 06206-75288

E-mail: boykinjan@hotmail.com or boykinj@mail3.bunt.com

Web site: <http://iski.no-ip.info>

Membership fees: \$25 for singles, \$35 for families.

Meetings: Viernheim Tennis Club, Dec. 16, Jan 6 and 20, Feb. 3 and 17, March 3, 17, and 31, April 21.

Trips: Dec. 30-Jan. 2, Portes du Soleil, Switzerland, 195 euros; Jan. 14-17 Portes du Soleil, 195 euros, bed & breakfast; Jan. 21-23, Grindelwald, Switzerland, 125 euros; Jan. 22-29, Kitzbühel, Austria, 330 euros, half-pension; Jan. 28-30, Lech/Zurs/St. Anton, Switzerland, 130 euros; Feb. 4-6, Portes du Soleil, 145 euros; Feb. 18-21, St. Anton, Austria, 180 euros, bed & breakfast; Feb. 25-27, Portes du Soleil, 145 euros; 4-6 March, Lech/Zurs/St. Anton, Austria, 130 euros; 11-13 March, Montafon, Austria, 130 euros; 18-20 March, Verbier, Switzerland, 140 euros; April 9-16, Meribel, France, price TBA, slope-side apartments. Prices based on double occupancy, supplement for singles accommodation.

PATCH SKI CLUB

Area: Stuttgart

Publicity: Mike Moon

Telephone: DSN 430-5789

E-mail: info@psc-ski.org and kineet@eucom.mil

Web site: www.patchskiclub.org

Address: CMR 480, Box 198, APO AE 09128

Membership fees: \$30 singles, \$45 families.

Meetings: Patch Community Club at 7 p.m. Next meetings: Jan. 5 and 19, Feb. 2 and 16, March 2 and 16, April 20 and May 4 and 21.

Trips: Dec. 19-26, Arberg I-Grindon, Austria, 580 euros; Dec. 19-26, Arberg I-Alpine, Austria, 430 euros; Dec. 26-Jan. 2, Les Menuires, France, 660 euros; Dec. 26-Jan. 1, Siegl I-St. Veit, Austria, 480 euros; Dec. 30-Jan. 2, Verbier, Switzerland, 210 euros; Jan. 13-17, Saas Fee, Switzerland, 380 euros; Jan. 14-17, Kitzbühel, Austria, 300 euros; Jan. 17-21, St. Veit, Austria, 390 euros; Jan. 28-30, Zell am See, Austria, 205 euros; Feb. 4-6, Engelberg, Switzerland, 190 euros; Feb. 18-21, Jungfrau, Switzerland, 230 euros; March 4-6, Gstaad, Switzerland, 200 euros; March 17-20, Chamonix,

France, 390 euros; April 7-10, St. Moritz, Switzerland, April 7-10, April 9-16, Val Thorens, France, 320 euros; April 29-May 1, Ischgl, Austria, 220 euros; May 27-30, Les Menuires, Austria, 290 euros; May 27-30, Siegl Golf-St. Veit, Austria, 260 euros. All trip costs quoted are based on double occupancy.

TANNENBAUM SKI CLUB

Area: Kaiserslautern Military Community, Eifel, Baumholder, Mannheim regions, Rheinland-Pfalz and Spangdahlem

E-mail contacts: David Hanavan, dave@tannenbaumskiclub.com; Rick Kane, rickvp@tannenbaumskiclub.com; Sylvia Warren, sylvia@tannenbaumskiclub.com; B. Campbell, barbara@tannenbaumskiclub.com; Darla Edmonds, freeheel@tannenbaumskiclub.com

Telephone: 06301-3478

Web address: www.tannenbaumskiclub.com

Address: c/o Rick Kane, Im Amstel 2, 67697 Otterberg, Germany

Membership fees: \$35 for singles, \$70 for families.

Meetings: First and third Wednesdays at 7:30 p.m. in Landstuhl Combined Community Club.

Trips: Dec. 19-26, Siegl Ski Week, St. Veit-Alpendorf, Austria, 385 euros; Dec. 26-Jan. 2, Dolomites Super Ski Week, 630 euros; Jan. 14-17, Chamonix, France, 250 euros; Jan. 14-17, Zell-am-See, Austria, 240 euros; Jan. 14-17, Crans-Montana, Switzerland, 240 euros; Jan. 20-Feb. 5, Siegl Ski Week I, St. Veit-Alpendorf, Austria, price TBA; Feb. 4-6, Gstaad, Switzerland, 195 euros; Feb. 18-21, Verbier, Switzerland, 210 euros; Feb. 18-21, Portes du Soleil, France, 245 euros; Feb. 18-21, Bad Gastein, Austria, 235 euros; March 4-6, Jungfrau, Switzerland, 160 euros; March 11-13, Davos, Switzerland, 215 euros; April 1-3, Engelberg, Switzerland, 200 euros; April 8-10, St. Anton, Austria, 165 euros; April 29-May 1, Ischgl, Austria, 205 euros. Prices based on double occupancy. All trips are by bus except the Siegl trips, which are U-drives. U-drive arrangements can be made on other trips.

WÜRZBURG INTERNATIONAL SKI CLUB

Acting president: Mike Hall

Telephone: 06109-1181562

E-mail: wsclub@hotmail.com

Web site: www.wsclub.org

Address: WISC, CMR 475, Box 1, APO AE 09036

Membership fees: 25 euros for singles, 40 euros for families.

Meetings: 6 p.m. on first and third Wednesdays of month at Zum Kirschenbaum Gasthaus on Würzburgstr. 18 in Rottendorf. Check the Web site for directions and map.

Trips: Dec. 19-25, St. Veit, Austria, 535 euros inc. lessons; Jan. 14-17, Dolomites, Italy, 220 euros; Feb. 18-21, Verbier, Switzerland, 220 euros; March 4-6, Jungfrau, Switzerland, 190 euros; April 9-16, Trois Vallées, France, 200-315 euros; April 29-May 1, Ischgl, Austria, 230 euros.



alpine snow conditions

Snow Report	Snow Base	Last New Snow	Lifts Open	General Information
Cervinia, IT	110/20	11/20	12/20	Good skiing on well groomed pistes
Garmisch, GER	65/0	11/29	10/34	The best conditions found on the upper slopes
Hintersee, AUS	100/5	12/01	15/21	Great skiing on well groomed pistes
Kaprun, AUS	90/0	11/20	11/24	Patchy snow cover in places
Kauertal, AUS	100/0	12/01	8/9	Last week's new snow has kept well
Leis Deuar Alps, FR	40/10	11/20	21/54	Decent skiing on upper runs
Neusiedl, AUS	80/0	12/01	20/24	Best snow found above mid-station
Passo Tonale, IT	150/100	12/22	16/18	16 lifts open, off-piste & Runs are packed
Pizol, AUS	110/15	11/29	7/7	Seven lifts are open. Resort runs are closed
Saas Fee, SW	172/22	11/20	13/22	13 lifts open & snow is not in bad condition
Sölden, AUS	90/0	11/20	10/34	Fast skiing up high benefiting from high altitude
Tignes, FR	70/18	11/20	18/90	18 in places, otherwise ok
Val Senales, IT	70/20	11/30	8/12	Best skiing terrain found on higher slopes.
Val Thonon, FR	65/30	11/30	14/30	Good skiing on well groomed pistes
Zermatt, SW	152/6	12/01	21/30	Good skiing can be found on the upper slopes

as of December 12/13, 2004 *All measurements in centimeters*

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Outdoor Recreation Ski Schedule

Kaiserslautern Patrick Benavides 489-7751/8631-536-7751
Dec. 23 & Jan. 1 Ski Express
Dec. 23-26 Garmisch, Germany
Dec. 23-26 Zermatt, Switzerland

Darmstadt Central Fitness Kaserne 348-6277/86151-48-4277
Jan. 8 Skiing in Engelberg, Switzerland

Mannheim Taylor Benavides 381-7115/0621-728-7115
Dec. 18 Skiing & Snowboarding
Engelberg, Switzerland

Heidelberg Patrick Henry Village 386-7032/8621-336-7032
Jan. 8 & 22 Feldberg, Germany

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TRAVEL Q&A

Christmas
will be quiet
in Dublin

The Washington Post

Q: My family will be visiting Dublin over Christmas. We are stumped about what to do Christmas Day. At home we might take in a movie or dine at a nice restaurant. Do you have any suggestions?

A: Dublin Tourism tells us the city is shut down on Christmas, as families gather in homes. Church services are about the only activity going on. If it's not too blustery, you could take a walk through the empty city. Perhaps equip each family member with a disposable camera and go on a photo-taking expedition?

You'd be wise to stay at an inn or hotel that has Christmas Day meals and activities, however limited they may be. The Aberdeen Lodge and Merion Hall serve traditional Irish breakfasts and Christmas Day lunches, have drawing rooms stocked with board games and offer free bread for guests to feed the ducks in Herbert Park (which should tell you how little there is to do). The two-night minimum costs \$309 per person double and includes breakfast and a mince pie and mulled wine reception. Info for both properties: (800) 617-3178 (not a free call in Europe), Web site www.halpinprivatetourists.com. At Clarion Stephens Hall (+353) (01) 638-1111, or www.stephenshall.com, a personal shopper can stock the fridge in the kitchen of your suite if you're going to arrive after the shops close. Suites cost \$154 a night and there is a three-night minimum.

For details on Dublin: Dublin Tourism, www.visitdublin.com.

Q: We're going to visit our son who is stationed with the Army near Darmstadt, Germany. What do you recommend we see? We like historical sites.

A: Darmstadt, 20 miles south of Frankfurt and 40 miles north of Heidelberg, was nearly leveled during World War II and reinvented itself as a modern city. It is known for its Technical University and the many software and other tech companies headquartered there. The city of 140,000 people offers several good museums, including the Hessian Regional Museum, the Palace Museum and the Darmstadt Artists' Colony Museum. Just outside Darmstadt are several historical sites, including the ruins of Frankenstein Castle and the Kranchstein Hunting Lodge, where open-air performances are held in the summer. For info, call (+49) (0) 6151-131, or go to www.darmstadt.de.

The area around Darmstadt offers many recreational activities. Wine-tasting in the Rheingau region, hiking in the Spessart and Odenwald areas, and touring the Loreley Valley are a few of the attractions.

For info on other sites, try the German National Tourist Office at www.cometgermany.com.

Volksmarch

Visit the Luxembourg city holiday market Saturday evening and get in a volksumarsch, too. Starting between 2 and 7 p.m., this event will take walkers along a 5- or 10-kilometer illuminated route through this 1,000-year-old city and its Christmas market.

See the 10th-century Boch Casemates

fortress, part of Luxembourg's original castle, or the Grand Ducal Palace, the official city residence of the grand duke. There's also the 7th-century Notre Dame Cathedral, shopping and, if you're hankering for an English-language movie, check out the theater downtown.

Grab the backpack for the goodies you'll buy in the market and the stores along the way, and bundle up for the march, dressing in layers. Leave "Fido" at home this time around; dogs are not permitted in the Mehrzweckhalle Boinevoe, also known as the Centre de Loisirs Boinevoe, start location.

Saturday evening, you should see this beautifully diverse city by light. It will be an experience you won't soon forget.

The Brussels, Belgium, evening walk, which at the Salle Omnisports Communale

Jennifer West



on Avenue du Suffrage Universel, takes marchers on 12-, 16-, or 20-kilometer trails. You have a choice of souvenirs. The cost for just the IVV stamp is 75 cents (euro). If you're interested in the stamp and a certificate, it will cost you 1 euro. A sticker goes for 50 cents (euro) and finally, if you want a medal, you'll have to pull out 4 euros.

If you're driving to Brussels along ES (Liège-Bruxelles) and then Ring 0 towards the city. Take exit 18 to the north (direction Nord) and then follow the yellow signs displaying the red lettered "MARCHE F.F.B.M.P."

If you arrive by train, use the Gare Centrale and hop on bus 66 toward Cimetière de Bruxelles. The trip should last 15 minutes. Get off at the "Grossing" stop and the start hall will be only 100 meters away.

Now that you know how to get there, what will you see? To be honest, the sights of Brussels are too many to list in the column so here are a few to whet your appetite (look them up in your travel books or on the Internet): the Grand Place, Musées Royaux de l'Armée et de l'Histoire Militaire (Royal Museum of the Army and Military History), Atomium, Musées Royaux d'Art et d'Histoire (Royal Museums of Art and History), and the Cinquan-

tenaire.

If you've never been to Brussels, or you have been and just haven't been in a while, make the trip this Saturday. Get there early enough to visit the Parc du Cinquantenaire, this incredible city and in Grand Place. Walk "au Cœur de Bruxelles," through the heart of Brussels. And speaking of water, don't forget you'll also see the Manneken Pis up close and personal along the trail. I just wouldn't get too close.

Miscellaneous short notes about this week's Volksumarsch events:

• Notes on walks in Italy from our pal Clark Seidner: The longer walks at Cusiana Basso di Giviera del Montello go through the hills of Giviera del Montello, a very pretty area. From past experience, this is a very popular walk. I would recommend arriving early as parking can be an adventure.

• If you're driving to the München-Pasing, Germany, event take exit 81 (Pasing) off Autobahn 8 and follow the IVV signs to the Max-Planck-Gymnasium on Weinbergstrasse 19.

The Kronau, Germany, walk is located 28 kilometers south of Heidelberg.

E-mail Jennifer West at volksmarch@mail.estripes.odm.it.

Listings come from brochures of IVV-sanctioned events that were mailed to Jennifer West. Locations are noted in the host language. More extensive lists are available in the IVV (Internationaler Volkssportverband, or International Federation of Popular Sports) Web site, www.ivv.org, or the DVV Terminliste, at www.dvv-wandern.de/Terminliste.htm.

Country/Town	Day(s) and Time(s)	Code	Km.	Starting Point	Award	Directional Reference
Austria						
Bregenz	Sun 0800-1200	BFX	5 & 10	Blumeneggssaal	B-medal	SE of Lindsay, GE
Belgium						
Bruxelles	Sat 1600-2100	P	12, 16, 20	Salle Omnisports	See notes	Avenue du Suffrage Universel
Germany						
Berlin	Sat 0900-1300	F	5 & 10	Zum Dorfkung	No award	NDG, Ostseestrasse
Bierbach	Sat & Sun 0700-1300	BDFX	5 & 10	Priminialshalle	Religious candleholder	SAR, NW of Zweibrücken
Bierbach	Sat & Sun 0700-1200	BDFX	20	Priminialshalle	Religious candleholder	SAR, NW of Zweibrücken
Großseelheim	Sun 0800-1200	BFX	5 & 10	Bürgerhaus	B-medal	HE, E of Kirchheim
Kronau	Sun 0700-1300	BFN	5, 10, 20	Mehrzweckhalle	Snowman figurine	BWN, S of Heidelberg
München-Pasing	Sat 0700-1500, Sun 0700-1300	BFX	6	Max-Planck-Gymnasium	B-medal	MOB, W of München
München-Pasing	Sat 0700-1400, Sun 0700-1300	BFX	10	Max-Planck-Gymnasium	B-medal	MOB, W of München
München-Pasing	Sat & Sun 0700-1200	BFX	20	Max-Planck-Gymnasium	B-medal	FRM, SW of Nürnberg
Obersbach	Sat 0800-1400, Sun 0800-1300	F	6 & 12	DJK-Halle	Pewter cup	FRU, NE of Würzburg
Untersperheim	Sat 0730-1300	BF	5 & 10	Turnhalle	B-medal	
Italy						
Bagnara di Giaro	Sun 0730-1000	F	7 & 13	Piazza A. Moro	Beans, BBQ, T-shirt	S of Pordenone
Cusignia Basso	Sun 0830	FX	5.5 & 12	Bat Bettoli	Baked item (1st 1500)	SW of Conigliano
Cusignia Basso	Sun 0830	FX	21 & 30	Bat Bettoli	Baked item (1st 1500)	SW of Conigliano
Passo di Liva (Duvellie)	Sun 0800-0900	F	5, 11, 20	In front of church	No award	N of Vicenza
Luxembourg						
Luxembourg city	Sat 1400-1900	F	5 & 10	Centre culturel Bonnevoie	No award	Behind main train station
Netherlands						
Bergen Terbijt	Sun 0700-1300	-	7, 14, 21	Café zaal Nuben	Sticker	E of Maastricht
Obbicht	Sat & Sun 0800-1300	-	7, 14, 21	Kantine V.V. Obbicht	No award	NW of Sittard
United Kingdom						
Amesbury	Sun 0900-1000	-	10 & 20	Sports Centre	Souvenir	-
Finedon	Sun 1000-1100	-	10 & 20	Bell Inn	Souvenir	NW of Rushden

GENERAL CODES:

C - Bring a cup for free refreshments at the control point
D - Shower/Wash facilities at start hall
F - Free refreshment at control points
M - Marathon or long-distance event
N - Nordic walking event

P - Music at start hall
S - Stroller-friendly trails
S - Shorter trail noted as stroller-friendly
T - Evening/light walk, carry a flashlight
X - Award available while supply lasts
W - Course suitable for wheelchairs

GERMAN STATE AND REGION CODES:

BWN - Baden-Württemberg Nord
BWS - Baden-Württemberg Süd
BR - Oberfranken (Upper Franconia)
FRU - Mittelfranken (Middle Franconia)
FRU - Unterfranken (Lower Franconia)

HE - Hessen
MB - München-Oberbayern
NDG - Niedersachsen/Berlin
NRW - Nordrhein-Westfalen
NDG - Niederbayern

OPF - Oberpfalz
RP - Rheinland-Pfalz
SAR - Saarland
SCH - Schwaben
SHH - Schleswig-Holstein/Hamburg
THS - Thüringen/Sachsen

Y - Young-Walkers-Tour or Bambini-Liga event
2.5 - Reduced price of 2.50 euros for start card & B-medal
3 - Reduced price of 3 euros for start card & B-medal



A hiker walks on the Luzisteig near Gusch, Switzerland, above the foggy Rhine valley, earlier this month.

Calendar

COMPILED BY
JAYNE TRAEENDLY
Stripes Travel researcher

Listings are the latest available at press time but are subject to change.

AUSTRIA

E-mail: inquiries@info.wien.at
www.austria-info.at
VIENNA: Imperial ball, **Dec. 31**;
Flower ball, **Jan. 14**; Technologists' ball, **Jan. 14**; Economics University ball, **Jan. 15**; Vienna Philharmonic ball, **Jan. 20**; Army officers' ball, **Jan. 21**; Pharmacists' ball, **Jan. 22**; Engineers' ball, **Jan. 27**; Physicians' ball, **Jan. 29**; Hunters' ball, **Jan. 31**; Opera ball, **Feb. 3**; Viennese coffee house owners' ball, **Feb. 2**; Bonbon ball, **Feb. 4**; Lawyers' ball, **Feb. 5**; Rudolfina masked ball, **Feb. 7**; Johann Strauss ball, **March 19**; Vienna: Dream on ice, **Jan. 21**; **March 6**, ice skating in front of the City Hall.

BELGIUM

E-mail: info@visitbelgium.com
BRUSSELS: Brussels on ice, **through Jan. 3**, ice shows and skating on Marche aux Poissons square.
ANTWERP: ice skating on market square, **through Jan. 8**.
ANTWERP: Snow and ice sculpture festival, **through Jan. 16**.
BRUSSELS: Antiques show, **Jan. 21-30**; Tour & Taxi.
BRUSSELS: Celebration of 175th anniversary, **throughout the year**.

ENGLAND

www.visitbritain.com
LONDON: New Year's Day parade, **Jan. 1**.
YORK: Stamp and coin fair, racecourse show, **Jan. 14-15**.
LONDON: Daily telephone adventure travel and sports show, **Jan. 14-16**, Olympia.
SPALDING: Motorbike 2005, **Jan. 15-16**.
LONDON: International mime festival, **Jan. 15-30**.
LONDON: Vivelafrance, **Jan.**

Best bet

NETHERLANDS: Enter the colorful world of 19th-century literature this weekend in the annual Charles Dickens Festival in Davenport. Plucked from the author's most famous novels, more than 350 characters, among them Scrooge, Marley, Oliver Twist, Fagin and Miss Havesham, will be on hand in the Hansaatic city's Berg Quarter. Christmas carolers and period food add to the atmosphere. The festival is open 11 a.m. to 5 p.m. While you're there, be sure to enjoy the city's Christmas market with more than 200 stalls.

— JAYNE TRAEENDLY

21-23. French travel and lifestyle show in Olympia.

FRANCE

www.francetourism.com
METZ: Flea market, **Dec. 18**. Open 8 a.m.-noon.
DUNKERQUE: Carnival, **Jan. 15-26**.
MENTON: Lemon festival, **Feb. 12-27**.
NICE: Carnival, **Feb. 12-27**.
PARIS: City marathon, **April 10**.

GERMANY

www.germany-tourism.de
MUNICH: Tollwood, **through Dec. 31**.
MUNICH: International motorcycle show, **Jan. 21-23**.
TODTMOOS: International dog sled races, **Jan. 29-30**.
SINSHEIM: Motorcycle exhibition, **Feb. 2-13**. Exhibition center.
BERLIN: International motorcycle show, **Feb. 4-6**. Fair grounds.
KOLN: Carnival parade, **Feb. 7**.
DUSSELDORF: Carnival parade, **Feb. 7**.
MAINZ: Carnival parade, **Feb. 7**.
BERLIN: International film festival, **Feb. 10-120**.

ITALY

www.italiantourism.com
ROME: New Year's Eve on the Piazza del Popolo, **Dec. 31-Jan. 1**.
THROUGHOUT the country: Various Epiphany celebrations, **Jan. 6**.
VENICE: Epiphany witches on the canal race, **Jan. 6**.
VIAREGGIO: Carnival, **Jan. 23-Feb. 13**.
VENICE: Carnival, **Jan. 28-Feb. 8**.

THE NETHERLANDS

www.holland.com
MAASTRICHT: Winterland Maas-tricht, **through Jan. 8**, ice skating on city square.
DEVENTER: Dickens festival, **Dec. 18-19**.
ROTTERDAM: International film festival, **Dec. 23-Jan. 2**.
APELDOORN: Midwinter marathon, **Jan. 29**.

SCOTLAND

www.visitscotland.com
EDINBURGH: Hogmanay, **Dec. 29-Jan. 1**.
CRIEFF: Cornie Hogmanay flam-beau procession, **Dec. 31-Jan. 1**.
THROUGHOUT the country: Burns' Night, **Jan. 25**.

SPAIN

www.tourspain.co.uk
SAN SEBASTIAN: Tamborrada, **Jan. 19-20**.

SWEDEN

www.gosweden.org
KIRUNA (Norrbotten): Snow festival, **Jan. 29-30**. Biggest in Europe.
JOKKMOKK (Norrbotten): Winter market, **Feb. 3-6**. Largest winter event in Northern Europe.

SWITZERLAND

www.switzerlandtourism.ch
BASEL: World money fair, **Feb. 11-13**. Coin fair.
GENEVA: International car show, **March 13-13**.

WALES

LLANWRITTY WELLS: New Year walk in, **Dec. 31-Jan. 1**.

BY JAYNE TRAEENDLY
Stripes Travel researcher

Paris marathon

If you've been thinking of running the Paris marathon, you might want to watch the registration numbers.

The race takes place April 10 and more than 20,000 people have already signed up, with 14,117 places left. If you register online before Dec. 31, the cost is \$4 euros. If you register Jan. 1 to Feb. 20, you pay 66 euros.

There also is a half-marathon on March 6.
Details and registration are at www.parismarathon.com.

Barnd on the Web

If you think that going to the Royal Shakespeare Company is just about seeing a performance, then you should check out its Web site at www.rsc.org.uk. In addition to the theater schedule in Stratford-upon-Avon, London and Newcastle, the site offers a variety of events associated with Shakespeare's plays and life.

For example, attend an "An Introduction To," where members of the creative teams discuss the creative process and their approaches to rehearsing and designing the shows. The cost is three pounds (about \$5).

Upcoming plays include "Beauty and the Beast" on Jan. 13, 12:30 p.m. to 1:30 p.m., and "The Two Gentlemen of Verona" on Jan. 19, 5 p.m. to 6 p.m.

With "Talkback," members of the cast discuss that evening's performance after the show.

Next is "The Two Gentlemen of Verona" on Jan. 25 (free).

Or attend an evening performance with understudies, many of them up-and-coming stars.

According to the Web site, after the press night, a full understudy run takes place under real performance conditions (cost is 5 pounds). The 2005 schedule has scheduled "A Midsummer Night's Dream," May 18, 1:30 p.m.; "Twelfth Night," May 25, 1:30 p.m.; "The Comedy of Errors," Aug. 30, 1:30 p.m.; and "As You Like It," Sept. 14, 1:30 p.m.

Other events include "Interpreting Shakespeare," created for students to discuss the play

before a show (3 pounds); "Production Notes," during which actors and staff discuss their rehearsal and performance choices; "The Director Talks" (5 pounds); and the RSC Summer School program at the Stratford-upon-Avon Shakespeare Institute (Aug. 19 to 27).

Turkey on Lent

Celebrate Lent with a pilgrimage to Turkey March 12 to 20. Organized by the Meyer Travel Group, the trip visits the first seven churches outside the Holy Land and other religious and historical sites. Escorts are Katie Meyer, art history expert, and Mike Dallas, parish council member and religious educator in Germany.

Highlights include visits to Izmir; Ephesus (House of the Virgin Mary, the apostle Paul's home for two years, site of the Temple of Artemis, one of the Seven Wonders of the World); churches in Sardis and Philadelphia; Pamukkale (ancient Hierapolis, a spa city traditionally connected to the apostle Philip); church in Laodicea; Aphrodisias (city of the Goddess of beauty and love); Pergamon (apocryphal church and historical sites); Assos (visits by Paul, classed by Aristotle); Troad (visits by apostles Paul, Timothy and Luke); Troy (the Iliad); and Istanbul (Cistern Basilica, Kariye Museum, Topkapı Palace, Grand Bazaar).

Cost is \$1,399 per person, double occupancy, and includes round-trip airfare Frankfurt, Germany to Turkey, air breakfasts, four dinners, eight nights' lodging, guided tours and entrance fees, airport transfers and licensed Turkish guide.

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EUROPEAN FORECAST

Benelux: Mostly cloudy with rain showers and isolated thunderstorms in the early afternoon. Highs in the low 40s, Friday lows in the low 30s.

Britain: Mostly cloudy with rain showers late in the morning. Highs in the 50s, Friday lows in the 40s.

Croatia and Bosnia: Cloudy with fog. Highs in the upper 30s, Friday lows in the mid 30s.

France: Partly cloudy with isolated rain showers. Highs in the upper 40s to mid 50s, Friday lows in the low 40s.

Northern Germany: Mostly cloudy and morning fog with rain showers late. Highs in the mid 50s to mid 40s, Friday lows in the mid-30s.

Southern Germany: Mostly cloudy and morning fog with rain showers late. Highs in the upper 30s, Friday lows in the mid-30s.

Hungary: Partly cloudy. Highs in the mid 50s, Friday lows in the upper 20s.

Northern Italy: Partly cloudy with isolated thunderstorms in the west. Highs in the 50s, Friday lows in the upper 20s.

Southern Italy: Mostly cloudy with rain showers and isolated thunderstorms. Highs in the mid 50s to lower 60s, Friday lows in the low 50s.

Kosovo: Cloudy with morning fog. Highs in the upper 30s, Friday lows in the low 30s.

Norway: Cloudy with rain. Highs in the 40s, Friday lows in the mid 20s to low 30s.

Portugal, Spain: Partly cloudy. Highs in the 50s to lower 60s, Friday lows in the low 50s to mid 30s.

Turkey: Partly cloudy. Highs in the lower 50s to mid-40s, Friday lows in the upper 30s to mid 20s.

For current weather watches, warnings, and 5-day forecasts go to the USAF Operational Weather Squadron home page at <https://www.ombach.af.mil> or <https://www.public.ombach.af.mil>

SUN & MOON

	Today	Tomorrow
Sunrise (Baghdad)	8:00AM	8:00AM
Sunrise (Frankfurt)	8:20AM	8:20AM
Sunset (Baghdad)	5:35PM	5:35PM
Sunset (Frankfurt)	4:25PM	4:25PM

	First light	Full moon	Last light	New moon
	18 Dec 04	26 Dec 04	3 Jan 05	10 Jan 05

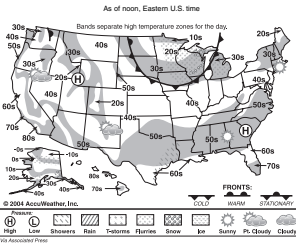
THE WORLD

	HI	LO		HI	LO
Amsterdam	48	37	Manila	88	78
Bahrain	64	55	Mexico City	62	36
Beijing	38	27	Montreal	38	29
Bombay	55	39	Riyadh	63	43
Buenos Aires	61	51	Rio de Jan	84	73
Calcutta	82	61	Sydney	43	26
Helsinki	61	51	Sofia	37	31
Hong Kong	73	63	Sydney	78	59
London	61	54	Tokyo	61	36

TODAY'S STATESIDE OUTLOOK

	HI	LO		HI	LO
Alabama	51	35	Idaho	40	25
Alaska	39	27	Illinois	40	25
Arizona	50	35	Indiana	40	25
Arkansas	50	35	Iowa	40	25
California	44	28	Kansas	40	25
Colorado	44	28	Kentucky	40	25
Connecticut	44	28	Louisiana	40	25
Delaware	44	28	Maine	40	25
District of Columbia	44	28	Massachusetts	40	25
Florida	44	28	Michigan	40	25
Georgia	44	28	Minnesota	40	25
Hawaii	44	28	Mississippi	40	25
Idaho	40	25	Montana	40	25
Illinois	40	25	Nebraska	40	25
Indiana	40	25	Nevada	40	25
Iowa	40	25	New Hampshire	40	25
Kansas	40	25	New Jersey	40	25
Kentucky	40	25	New Mexico	40	25
Louisiana	40	25	New York	40	25
Maine	40	25	North Carolina	40	25
Massachusetts	40	25	North Dakota	40	25
Michigan	40	25	Oklahoma	40	25
Minnesota	40	25	Oregon	40	25
Mississippi	40	25	South Carolina	40	25
Montana	40	25	South Dakota	40	25
Nebraska	40	25	Tennessee	40	25
Nevada	40	25	Texas	40	25
New Hampshire	40	25	Utah	40	25
New Jersey	40	25	Vermont	40	25
New Mexico	40	25	Washington	40	25
New York	40	25	West Virginia	40	25
North Carolina	40	25	Wisconsin	40	25
North Dakota	40	25	Wyoming	40	25

THE UNITED STATES TODAY



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THURSDAY, DECEMBER 16, 2004

	AFN-FAMILY	AFN-MOVIE	AFN-EUROPE	AFN-KOREA	AFN-NEWS	AFN-SPORTS	SPECTRUM	AFN-PACIFIC
9:00	Stanley	Movie "Crail Justice" (1999 Drama) A Martinez, Nick Lyons, Arjona, Kim Kuyik.	Dr. Phil	Jeopardy!	Nightline	College Basketball (Taped) Northwestern, (Upd)	Nipiga Bites Christmas Recipes for the holiday season.	Jeopardy!
9:30	Sage-Siemens Cat		Headline News	Headline News	Navy/Marine Corps News		Headline News	Headline News
10:00	Arthur Baby Kate arrives (E)		(K-6) Oprah Winfrey	ESPNNews	Hardball With Chris Matthews		Design on a Dime	ESPNNews
10:30	Reading Rainbow (E)	(145) Movie *** "The Shawshank Redemption" (1994) Tim Robbins, Morgan Freeman. A male-male romance writer is sent to prison for murder.	(35) Guiding Light	You and a Half Men	The O'Reilly Factor	SportsCenter	Style Star	Pacific Report
11:00	Sage-Siemens Cat		(17) General Hospital	Will & Grace			et Live News	You and a Half Men
11:30	Stanley		Headline News	CBS Crime Scene Investigation- "XX"	60 Minutes	NBA Basketball Orlando Magic at San Antonio Spurs. From the CBS Center in San Antonio. (Taped)	The King of Queens	Will & Grace
12:00	Dora the Explorer		Judge Judy	CBS Crime Scene Investigation- "Sad to Be the Bone"	Fox and Friends		Girlfriends "Inherit the Lynn"	CBS Crime Scene Investigation- "XX"
12:30	The Wiggles "Liv"	Movie *** "The Juvies" (1986) Saperstein, David Moon, Alec Baldwin.	Today Kate Beckwith.				Charmed "Sam I Am"	CBS Crime Scene Investigation- "Sad to Be the Bone"
13:00	Bob the Builder			Pacific Report	Fox and Friends			Pacific Report
13:30	Dragon Tales (E)			The Tonight Show		SportsCenter	Ally McBeal "Love on Holiday"	The Tonight Show
14:00	Blue's Clues "Shirley"	(145) Movie *** "A Very Brady Sequel" (1994) Shirley Long. A girl artist enters the lives of the equally-plain class.	Legend of Tarzan	Late Show	American Morning		Any Now "This is Not Toposia, It's the Star"	Late Show
15:00	Full House		Asahi! Real Monsters	Destinations	OWN Live Today	NASCAR Year in Review	ER "Next of Kin"	
16:00	Pokémon		Subrina, the Animated Series	In the Mix	Access Hollywood	NBA Fastbreak	Law & Order "Scrambled"	Access Hollywood
17:00	Yu-Gi-Oh!	Coming Attractions	Showbiz Moms & Dads	Headline News	The Late Late Show	SportsCenter		The Late Late Show
17:30	Rocket Power			Headline News		FOX News		
18:00	SpongeBob SquarePants	Short Movies	AFN Evening News	Dennis Miller		NFL Live	The Simpsons	
18:30	Rugrats	Entertainment Tonight	AFN Evening News	Dennis Miller		NBA Basketball Utah Jazz at Phoenix Suns. From America West Arena in Phoenix.	Everybody Loves Raymond	Dennis Miller
19:00	That's So Raven	Movie *** "Being John Malkovich" (1999) John Cusack. A street puppeteer discovers a portal to the actor's brain.	Two and a Half Men	Will & Grace	Countdown With Keith Obermann	FOX News	Summertime "To Thine Own Self Be True"	Countdown With Keith Obermann
19:30	AI That		CBS Crime Scene Investigation- "XX"	Headline News	Entertainment Studios.com	ESPNNews	The Practice "Down the Hatch"	Entertainment Studios.com
20:00	Hi Heaven "I Love Lucy"		(105) Movie *** "Blasf From the Past" (1999) Comedy	Headline News	The Hot List	Studio B With Shepard Smith	48 Hours Mystery	The Hot List
21:00	Sabrina, the Teenage Witch		Headline News	Good Morning America	Your World With Neil Cavuto	First and Ten	Friends	Good Morning America
22:00	The Cosby Show		The Tonight Show		Lester Holt Live	NFL Live	Seinfeld "The Slicer"	Seinfeld
23:00	Home Improvement	Movie *** "Bad Boys" (1995, Drama) Martin Lawrence	Late Show			Around the Horn	The Daily Show	
23:30						Pardon the Interruption	Blind Date	

FRIDAY, DECEMBER 17, 2004

00:00	Asahi! Real Monsters	(11:00) Movie *** "Bad Boys" (1995) Martin Lawrence	(11:30) Late Show	Play With Me Sesame	Headline News	SportsCenter	Late Night	Play With Me Sesame
00:30	Rocket Power		Access Hollywood	Beer in the Big Blue House	NBC Nightly News		Summertime "To Thine Own Self Be True"	Wheel in the Big Blue House
1:00	SpongeBob SquarePants	(06) Movie *** "School Days" (1988, Drama) Larry Flynt. A teenage boy discovers a portal to the actor's brain.	NFL's Greatest Game 1980 AFC Division Playoffs.	Wheel of Fortune	CBS Evening News	NBA Action	The Practice "Down the Hatch"	Wheel of Fortune
1:30	Rugrats		Dr. Phil	College Basketball Ohio State at Texas Tech. (Live)	NewsHour Weekend With Jim Lehrer	(15) NBA Basketball Cleveland Cavaliers at Detroit Pistons. From the Palace of Auburn Hills in Auburn Hills, Mich. (Live)	48 Hours Mystery	Dr. Phil
2:00	That's So Raven		Oprah Winfrey	Nightly News	Harmony & Colmes		Friends	Oprah Winfrey
3:00	Hi Heaven "I Love Lucy"	Movie *** "Being John Malkovich" (1999) John Cusack. A street puppeteer discovers a portal to the actor's brain.	Judge Judy	Nightly Business Report	NBA Basketball Los Angeles Lakers at Sacramento Kings. From ARCO Arena in Sacramento, Calif. (Live)	Body Shape	Teacher's Pet (E)	
3:30	AI That		Headline News	Leu Dobbs Tonight	Caribbean Workout		What's New Scooby-Do?	Ozzy & Drix
4:00	Sabrina, the Teenage Witch		Headline News	(13) General Hospital	Larry King Live	Inside the NBA	The View	The Brothers Garcia
4:30	Sabrina, the Teenage Witch		Play With Me Sesame	Larry King Live	NewsNight With Aaron Brown		Seinfeld "The Slicer"	Judge Judy
5:00	Sesame Street (E)	(05) Movie *** "Blasf From the Past" (1999) Comedy	Headline News	Ozzy & Drix	BET Nightly News	SportsCenter	Entire Live	Headline News
5:30	Seanne Street (E)	Brendan Fraser, Alicia Silverstone, Christopher Walken.	Headline News	King of the Hill	Hardball With Chris Matthews		The Look for Less	Pacific Report
6:00	Barney & Friends (E)		Headline News	The O'Reilly Factor		SportsCenter	et Live News	King of the Hill
6:30	Blue's Clues (E)	Showbiz Moms & Dads	Headline News	PrimeTime Thursday	NBA Basketball Cleveland Cavaliers at Detroit Pistons. From the Palace of Auburn Hills in Auburn Hills, Mich. (Live)		Charmed "To Mummy Lamber"	The Apprentice
7:00	Dragon Tales (E)		Headline News	Fox and Friends		SportsCenter	Ally McBeal "The Man With the Star"	Pacific Report
7:30	Bob the Builder		Headline News	American Morning		NFL Total Access	Any Day Now	Late Show
8:00	The Wiggles	Short Movies	Headline News	OWN Live Today		World Sport	ER "Hindsight"	Access Hollywood
8:30	Dora the Explorer	Entertainment Tonight	Headline News			SportsCenter	The Simpsons	The Late Late Show
9:00	Stanley	Movie *** "Daddy" (1991, Drama) Patrick Duffy, Lydia Carter. An executive's wife of 20 years deserts her family.	Headline News	Today Harry Connick Jr.: It's Cop Time, Christmas windows.		NFL Total Access	Everybody Loves Raymond	Dennis Miller
9:30	Sage-Siemens Cat		Headline News	Teacher's Pet (E)		World Sport	Charmed "Spin City"	Countdown With Keith Obermann
10:00	Arthur (E)		Headline News	Headline News		NFL Total Access	Blue Planet: Seas of Life Frozen Solid	Good Morning America
10:30	Reading Rainbow (E)		Headline News	Headline News		NFL Live	Seinfeld "The Betrayal"	Ozbi
11:00	Stanley "Lille Dog Lost"		Headline News	Headline News		NFL Live	Blind Date	Clifford's Puppy Days (E)
11:30	Stanley "Lille Dog Lost"		Headline News	Headline News		NFL Live	Blind Date	Clifford's Puppy Days (E)
12:00	Dora the Explorer		Headline News	Headline News		NFL Live	Blind Date	Clifford's Puppy Days (E)
12:30	The Wiggles "Zingo Zap"		Headline News	Headline News		NFL Live	Blind Date	Clifford's Puppy Days (E)
13:00	Bob the Builder		Headline News	Headline News		NFL Live	Blind Date	Clifford's Puppy Days (E)
13:30	Dragon Tales (E)		Headline News	Headline News		NFL Live	Blind Date	Clifford's Puppy Days (E)
14:00	Blue's Clues "Words" (E)		Headline News	Headline News		NFL Live	Blind Date	Clifford's Puppy Days (E)
15:00	Funtastic Home Videos		Headline News	Headline News		NFL Live	Blind Date	Clifford's Puppy Days (E)
16:00	Full House		Headline News	Headline News		NFL Live	Blind Date	Clifford's Puppy Days (E)
16:30	Pokémon		Headline News	Headline News		NFL Live	Blind Date	Clifford's Puppy Days (E)
17:00	Asahi! Real Monsters		Headline News	Headline News		NFL Live	Blind Date	Clifford's Puppy Days (E)
17:30	Rocket Power		Headline News	Headline News		NFL Live	Blind Date	Clifford's Puppy Days (E)
18:00	SpongeBob SquarePants		Headline News	Headline News		NFL Live	Blind Date	Clifford's Puppy Days (E)
18:30	Rugrats		Headline News	Headline News		NFL Live	Blind Date	Clifford's Puppy Days (E)
19:00	AI That		Headline News	Headline News		NFL Live	Blind Date	Clifford's Puppy Days (E)
19:30	That's So Raven		Headline News	Headline News		NFL Live	Blind Date	Clifford's Puppy Days (E)
20:00	Sabrina, the Teenage Witch		Headline News	Headline News		NFL Live	Blind Date	Clifford's Puppy Days (E)
20:30	Jimmy Neutron: Boy Genius		Headline News	Headline News		NFL Live	Blind Date	Clifford's Puppy Days (E)
21:00	That's So Raven		Headline News	Headline News		NFL Live	Blind Date	Clifford's Puppy Days (E)
21:30	Sabrina, the Teenage Witch		Headline News	Headline News		NFL Live	Blind Date	Clifford's Puppy Days (E)
22:00	Radio Free Roscoe		Headline News	Headline News		NFL Live	Blind Date	Clifford's Puppy Days (E)
22:30	The Cosby Show		Headline News	Headline News		NFL Live	Blind Date	Clifford's Puppy Days (E)
23:00	Home Improvement		Headline News	Headline News		NFL Live	Blind Date	Clifford's Puppy Days (E)

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FACES

Carlton blazes own path to musical glory

BY NERESA MUMBI MOODY

The Associated Press

IT'S hard to imagine a more pop debut than Vanessa Carlton's.

Her piano-infused "A Thousand Miles" became an anthem of 2002, garnered her three Grammy nominations and helped her sell more than 2 million copies of "Be Not Nobody," her first album. But as she releases her sophomore set, "Harmonium," Carlton prefers to define herself as out of the mainstream.

"I am kind of an alternative to kind of the very popular hip-hop stuff and other really mainstream pop artists," says the 24-year-old singer-songwriter, sitting in a studio at New York's famed Hits Factory. "I'm an alternative to the Simpson girls."

Carlton has done well by defining herself as the alternative to commercialized pop; with her first album, the brunette was cast as one of the emerging anti-Britneys — female artists who wrote their own material, playing their own instruments and rejected the role of pop's oversized victim.

Carlton hopes to cast herself next as a career artist, instead of the hot singer of the moment.

Q: You were among a rising group of female singer-songwriters considered an alternative to Britney Spears and Christina Aguilera. Do you feel you were lumped in with other artists?

A: I did, but I thought that the trend of that time probably helped propel me forward.

When you're part of a trend, it tends to be easier to kind of break through, and at this point now I'm just kind of standing on my own and it feels nice to be one of the few people that are doing what I am attempting to do.

I'm not really scared by it at all. To walk the bold path is not something that I'm afraid of, and if I'm releasing a song to radio and it's the only song on radio that sounds that way, that to me is a plus as opposed to me being concerned that I'm not fitting a preconceived mold.

Q: You say this record is more serious — why?

A: It's a darker-themed album. (When you're a writer and you're 16 and 17 years old, you kind of like go through a diary stage where you're kind of mostly narcissistic and dealing with yourself, and writing



Singer Vanessa Carlton poses at the Hit Factory music studios in New York.

for me is a very selfish thing, where as it's solely about comforting myself.

And just as you grow up, you kind of start to absorb your environment in a different way, you develop a different perspective.

Q: What was the whirlwind like when you were nominated for the Grammys?

A: It kind of went over my head... It was

almost too easy.

I was working for years and suddenly it came, and as much as someone could say, "You worked for four years, five years, and it all comes and it feels so good" — it's all going at such a fast pace that it doesn't feel easy, it just feels like it's whipping through your fingers as it's happening and there's no real way to absorb it or appreciate it,

and that was really what was happening.

Now I don't think it would be like that. (But) the Grammys to me was dealing with the battery pack strapped around my leg, making sure I could hear my vocal and the piano at the same time.

Q: Did you enjoy it?

A: Being at the actual Grammys? No. I enjoyed the attention ... but it's one of the most stressful awards. I couldn't even get a cup of water backstage.

Q: Do you think this album is more of a mature record?

A: I think the album is a reflection of a more womanly point of view on the world. There was something kind of innocent and girlish about the first record ... But with that said, I tend to have a very wholesome image. I don't really strip or do anything like that.

Q: You haven't done the Maxim layout?

A: (laughs) No, and I don't have a desire to, because the bottom line is I feel womanly and sexy and confident. ... I feel like taking off all of your clothes [is] doing it to get attention from men, and I don't feel like I need to fight for it.

I feel sexy in pajamas. I think as a woman growing up in this society, it's really easy, dangerously easy, to kind of fall into the trappings of what your image should be, how you should look.

The expectation for women has gotten about out of hand. I try to separate myself from the whole thing.

Q: How do you not fall into that? So many women have vowed to never do it, and then a few months later they're showing skin.

A: Well, I think that I'm perfectly happy that my brain is bigger than my boobs, and that's quite all right with me.

There's a pressure to stay thin and pretty, but I don't feel a pressure to be naked or get a boob job or anything like that. I'm sure I would sell more records ... but I couldn't care less. I have friends and family and a boyfriend and I don't have to prove myself to anyone.

And with that said, I definitely have one of the better (behinds) in the music industry, and no one will see it because I'm sitting at the piano!

Elton John nixes concert due to infection

Singer Elton John canceled a second British concert because of a throat infection.

John, 57, blamed the infection for the cancellation of his planned show Sunday at the Scottish Exhibition and Conference Centre in Glasgow — the fourth concert in a tour of Britain. Two nights earlier, he had canceled a concert in Nottingham.

"I've been doing all that I can to try to get my voice back and I've seen a throat specialist again today and he's advised that it would be foolish to go ahead with tonight's show," John said in a statement.

Earlier this month, the rock legend was honored with a star-studded tribute at the Kennedy Center.

Bob Marley for Jamaican national hero

He's received countless musical accolades, inspired millions with his message of "one love" and is even hailed as a prophet by some.

Now, members of Bob Marley's estate are lobbying the

government to proclaim the dreadlocked reggae singer a national hero, Jamaica's highest honor. Marley died of cancer in Miami in 1981 at 36, and some of his family members have lived in South Florida.

"Anywhere you go in the world the first thing people think of when they hear Jamaica is Bob Marley," said Jacqueline Knight-Campbell, who is organizing the campaign for the Bob Marley Foundation. "He has inspired so many people with his songs so it's time for us to step up and take Bob's recognition to a higher level."

The foundation is also seeking to have his birthday — Feb. 6 — declared a national holiday.

Only seven Jamaicans have been named national heroes, including black civil rights leader Marcus Garvey and former Prime Minister Alexander Bustamante.

Country singer released from hospital

Veteran country singer Little Jimmy Dickens has been released from a hospital where he was treated for pneumonia.

A Grand Ole Opry spokeswoman said Dickens was dis-

charged after nearly a week and sent home with orders to rest. He will turn 84 Sunday.

His hits include "May the Bird of Paradise Fly Up Your Nose," "A Sleepin' at the Foot of the Bed" and "Out Beyond the Barn."

Famed Navy pilot to move to Nebraska

Navy pilot Shane Osborn, who guided a crippled surveillance plane to a safe landing on Chinese soil in 2001, plans to move back to Nebraska this spring.

The University of Nebraska-Lincoln graduate said he and his family probably will make their home in Omaha or Lincoln.

Currently, Osborn is stationed at the Naval Discharge Review Board in Washington, D.C. He has served nine years in the Navy.

On April 1, 2001, Osborn was flying over the South China Sea when a Chinese fighter plane got too close to the Navy plane and the jets collided. The plane plunged 7,500 feet before Osborn gained control and landed.

None of the 24 crewmembers was hurt, but they were taken prisoner for 11 days before being released.

Stories and photos from The Associated Press



John



Marley



Osborn

OPINION

A nation's gratitude to the families of 9/11

BY CHRISTOPHER SHAYS
AND CAROLYN MALONEY

Congress finally passed historic legislation last week to overhaul the nation's intelligence system. Members of the Sept. 11 commission, who spent nearly two years investigating the government's failure to detect that massive terrorist plot, believe the legislative action is a landmark moment in the reform of the government that enacts to prevent future terrorism against the country.

Even so, the bill faced strong opposition, both in public and in the back rooms of Congress. A fierce fight against reform is all but guaranteed in the halls of government whenever changes of such magnitude are sought in Washington. In this battle for reform, however, there was a force greater than the inertia of the status quo.

While many deserve credit for the coming sea change in our intelligence system, including members of the Sept. 11 commission, no one deserves the country's gratitude more than the determined family members of those killed in the terrorist attacks of Sept. 11, 2001.

They turned their grief and anger into vehicles for change, and in so doing they helped undermine the American safer and stronger for generations.

Just imagine for a moment being called "a 9/11 family member." On its own the label is a burden no one would want to carry. These families carried that burden further than any of us could imagine.

They stood up time and again in public and in the offices of powerful national leaders, conveying their personal loss and their belief that no American family should ever endure a loss like the one they experienced on Sept. 11. They did all this to compel our government to join their fight for a safer America.

While not all family members were involved, and while those who stood up for reform expressed differences over the precise final version of the legislation, no one can deny the power of their collective voices in keeping this legislation rolling forward.

The Sept. 11 commission, because of the administration's initial opposition to it, would not have been created had it not been for the pressure exerted by 9/11 families. The commission would have been underfunded and delayed in its work had it not been for the families had not intervened. When the bureaucracy sought to deny the information the commission needed, the families again were unafraid to exert pressure on the president and Congress to

do the right thing. When the commission sought an extension to complete its work in a thorough way, the 9/11 families did not rest until those who sought a premature end to the commission backed down.

And finally, after the release of the commission's report and recommendations, these same family members led the effort to make the recommendations the law of our land. When they thought their work was done this past summer, they had to roll up their sleeves again and fight right until the last moment to get it done. As a last effort, many of the 9/11 family members held vigil day after day, at Ground Zero and in cities across the country, as Congress reached the end of its session. For these families, this legislation was about far more than intelligence reform, it was about fighting terrorism on every front, achieving lasting change after suffering unforgettable losses.

We believe this intelligence reform legislation, so crucial to the future safety of the American people, would not have seen the light of day without the tireless effort of the family members who loved ones on Sept. 11. The leaders of this tremendous effort deserve recognition: Carol Ashley, mother of Janice Ashley; Kristina Breitweiser, wife of Ronald Breit-



weiser; Patty Casazza, wife of John F. Casazza; Beverly Eckert, wife of Sean Rooney; Mary Fletcher, mother of Bradley James Fletcher; Monica Gabrielle, wife of Richard Gabrielle; Bill Harvey, husband of Sara Manley Harvey; Mindy Kleinberg, wife of Alan Kleinberg; Carle Lemack, daughter of Judy Laroque; Steve Push, husband of Lisa J. Raines; Sally Regenhard, mother of Chris-

tian Michael Otto Regenhard; Lorie Van Auker, wife of Kenneth Van Auker; and Robin Wiener, sister of Jeffrey Wiener.

We hope we speak for the nation when we express our gratitude, our respect, and our deepest appreciation for the 9/11 families' devotion to our country's safety.

Rep. Christopher Shays, R-Conn., and Rep. Carolyn Maloney, D-N.Y., are co-founders of the 9/11 Commission Caucus in the House of Representatives.

Russia can't keep cloak-and-dagger ways under wraps

BY FRED HIATT

The Washington Post

Many experts have speculated about why President Vladimir Putin and his narrow circle seem so disinclined to lead Russia in a self-defeating direction. Explanations range from misplaced imperial nostalgia to personal insecurity and a need for absolute control to a deep-seated response to the Russians' understandable desire for stability. Increasingly, though, it seems another, perhaps more rational, motive should not be excluded: simple greed.

As to the misrule, there can no longer be much doubt. Russia continues to benefit from high oil prices, the salvation of incompetent rulers all over the world, but on the most fundamental score card — demography — Russia faces catastrophe. Its population is dwindling; in just the first eight months of this year, population declined by a half-million. The population is forecast to fall from 150 million when the Soviet Union collapsed to 120 million by 2030.

Male death rates in particular have exploded, and life expectancy is lower than it was 40 years ago. AIDS and tuberculosis could make matters far worse; yet Putin pays no attention to these incipient epidemics and not much to the blossoming epidemic of alcoholism.

The stifling of political and civic freedom under Putin is well-controlled. Television is again state-controlled, power is concentrated in the Kremlin, the renamed KGB harasses academics and citizen-advocates.

The regime is beginning to isolate itself internationally, too. At a forum of European and North American nations last week, Russia put itself in the remarkably Cold War position of vetoing a measure supporting Ukrainian democracy that the Ukrainians themselves put forward. Russia's only ally was Europe's only total dictatorship, Belarus.

None of this is remotely in ordinary Russians' interest, nor did it seem inevitable 10 or even five years ago. Then many Russians learned that they had nothing to fear and much to gain from living in a rule-based society, with democratic neighbors and growing ties to Europe. Reformers in Putin's government believed he wanted to move toward a nation governed by law, not fear or personal whim.

What happened? No doubt deep-seated habits of nationalist thinking, superpower envy and secret-police paranoia have played a role. But so, perhaps, at least among some Kremlin insiders, has the lure of riches — the temptation of property redistribution.

At least as hard to entertain as such thoughts as the destruction of Yukos Oil Co. unfolds. This was Russia's most-profitable and most-efficient energy company until its chief was put in prison more than 13 months ago. Since then it has been socked with one tax bill after another — the most recent last

week — until its bills to the government for 2001 and 2002 now exceed its revenue for those years, according to its American chief executive, Steven Theede.

Yet the government shows no interest in negotiating a payment schedule, Theede says. Instead, it has scheduled an auction of Yukos' core assets for Sunday, with a government-controlled company quite likely the only bidder, at a price as low as one-third of the assets' real worth. It's "illegal expropriation," in Theede's words.

Some investors hope the gangster tactics will cease once Yukos is gone. But just last week tax authorities sent a \$158 million tax bill to a cell phone company that has been feuding with the telecommunications minister, who allegedly (he denies it) has a financial interest in a competitor. (The tax authorities, at least showing a sense of humor, sent a \$3 million bill to the competing company.)

The government in neighboring Ukraine had been running affairs the same way, sell-

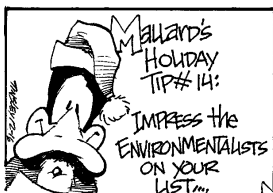
ing off valuable assets to privileged insiders, and democrats there see a connection between Putin's support of Ukraine's government-backed candidate in recent elections and the similarity in economic systems. "What they have created in Russia is state capitalism," says Oleh Rybachuk, chief of staff to reform candidate Viktor Yushchenko in Ukraine, and an end to corruption in Ukraine would be "a vital danger" to that system.

The stifling of free press and political opposition in Russia may have been undertaken for other reasons, but it certainly facilitates Russia-style official theft. Who now dares object? And here's the most depressing part: Once a regime becomes hooked on expropriation, no matter how gussied up with legal niceties, it can never voluntarily give up power. ... Even if theft were not the original goal, the criminal logic consumes all else.

Fred Hiatt is editor of The Post's editorial page.

Mallard Fillmore

BY BRUCE TINSLEY



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Horoscope

Love planet Venus embraces the realm of Sagittarius, where it will languish until the second week of January. We're like curious teens who are at once repelled and compelled by the notion of falling in love. The more "dangerous" a romantic prospect, the more drawn we are to it! This transit also brings a greater acceptance of other cultures.

TODAY'S BIRTHDAY

(December 16). You're sure of yourself this year — confidence carries you into situations you could only speculate about in years past. Increased career demands in the new year are a good thing, giving you the opportunity to show you're worthy of a better position. Love is fulfilling and comfortable until May, when you turn into an infatuated teen again! Your lucky numbers are: 6, 40, 50, 33 and 21.

ARIES (March 21-April 19).

You're not acting out of your own need to succeed; you're performing for those around you. Whatever the motivation, it causes you to push yourself. You'll be an inspiration to that perpetual underachiever you know.

TAURUS (April 20-May 20).

Colleagues could treat you as a freshman — how annoying, especially considering that you're the one with all the experience. When you focus on what you know, instead of on how others treat you, it is a source of pride.

GEMINI (May 21-June 21). If

others look at you sideways, pay them no mind. You're a self-taught person and therefore have a unique way of solving problems. Singles meet love while helping a friend or boss.

CANCER (June 22-July 22). An experimental mood has you feeling flippant, clever and playful! You'll get a crash course in romantic communication and learn very quickly what works — and what never to say again!

LEO (July 23-Aug. 22). When

barraged with too much information. you're discerning, objective and fair. You'll be exposed to propaganda. It's your job to make sure the more gullible people around you aren't duped.

VIRGO (Aug. 23-Sept. 22). If today were a painting, it would be a slick piece of pop art. You'll be seduced by glamour, commercialism and celebrity—but at the same time, something deeper in you longs for substance. Reach to loved ones to get grounded.

LIBRA (Sept. 23-Oct. 23). You're not a cartoon character who, after being flattened by a steamroller, arrives in the next scene back to normal again. You're flesh and bone and spirit — you require a recovery period! Give it to yourself.

SCORPIO (Oct. 24-Nov. 21). Loved ones have you doing acrobatics in order to get the validation you desire. Consider the lengths you'll go to for something you could possibly provide for yourself. What would it take for you to love yourself more?

SAGITTARIUS (Nov. 22-Dec. 21). You're deep, so you see depth in things that other people can only see in one dimension. It's remarkable how you can turn the most menial of jobs into a trip through the grand amusement park of life.

CAPRICORN (Dec. 22-Jan. 19). You may be accident prone, so keep your mind on the task at hand. You're also vulnerable to happy mistakes — the kind that land you in a much better position than the one you intended.

AQUARIUS (Jan. 20-Feb. 18). A penchant for overblown passion is featured. But your relationship doesn't deserve or need the flash of drama. Exorcise the feeling by reading a romance novel while listening to a Liberace record.

PISCES (Feb. 19-March 20). Dare to make new requirements of your friends, your customers and the people who help you maintain your lifestyle. What would happen if you expected 10 percent more integrity and heart from these folks?

Creators Syndicate

Holiday Mathis



Calvin and Hobbes



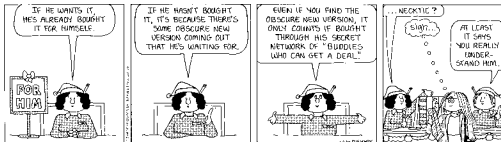
lump Start



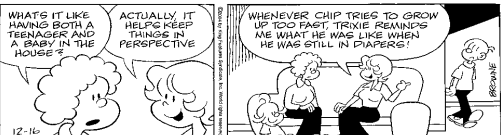
Zits



Cathy



li and Lois



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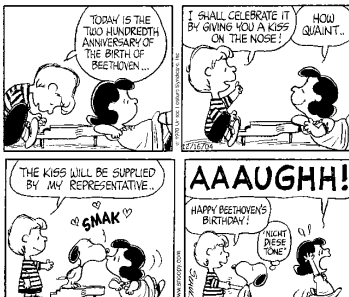
Red and Rover



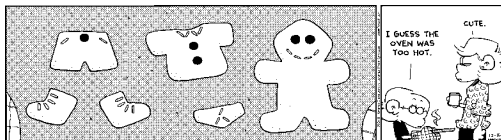
Better or Worse



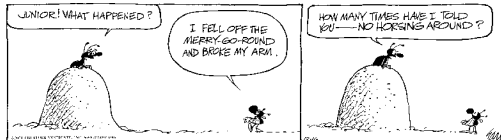
Peanuts



Fotrot



B.C.



Baby Blues



Spider Man



Blondie



Dilbert



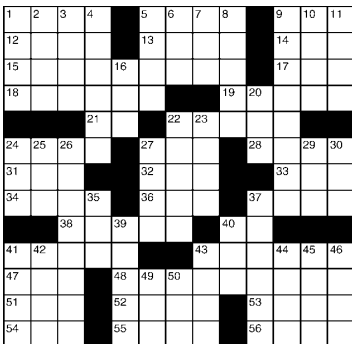
Hagar



Garfield



Eugene Sheffer Crossword



Across

- 1 Indy circuits
5 Minus
9 Pooch
12 Settled down
13 "— You Babe"
14 Spacewalk acronym
15 Moses' armload
17 Scoundrel
18 Toadies
19 Spacious
21 Old man
22 1982 Barry Levinson movie
24 Lather
27 Started
28 Engrossed
31 Multipurpose truck
32 Trick taker, usually

- 55 Barely gets by, with "out"
56 Uncomplicated

Down

- 1 Woman
2 Sheltered
3 Snapshots
4 Postage
5 "The — King"
6 Early bird
7 Old French coin
8 Unrelenting
9 Adorn
10 Latin 6-Down
11 Indiana city
16 Actress
Thompson
20 "— the ramparts ..."
22 Fake drake
23 The same (Lat.)
24 U-boat
25 Actress Hagen
26 Just said no
27 Easter entree
29 Shell-game prop
30 Treat hides
35 Weeding tool
37 Handle
38 wrongly
39 Move a bit
40 Foundation
41 Power source
42 "David Copperfield" wife
43 Lowers the lights
44 Scintilla
45 Wishes undone
46 Catch sight of
49 Wapiti
50 Prompt

Answer to Previous Puzzle



12-16

CRYPTOQUIP

XPEUI PT XPO TEPW N
TNLZLRA ULOBOE WLAJB
FO "N XNLB LI N BOELFZO

BJLRA BP WLRU."
Yesterday's Cryptquip: I ASKED MY HORSE IF HE'D LIKE SOME MORE HAY. "NO THANK YOU, I'M ALREADY STUFFED."

Today's Cryptquip Clue: X equals W

Eavesdroppers can be toyed with

Dear Abby: My husband took me out to an expensive restaurant. As we chatted over dinner, we realized that the couple next to us was eavesdropping on our conversation. They could hear everything we were saying. They kept turning their heads and looking straight at us. They even tried to peek when the check came.

My husband and I tried to ignore it, however, it put a damper on our nice evening. How should we tell our neighbors that we were out of our dinner conversation?

— Conversationally Speaking in Delaware
Dear Conversationally Speaking: You and your husband missed an opportunity to have some fun. If you invent wild enough dialogue, the reaction can be funnier than a floor show. You could have raised your voices just a bit and begun discussing how you were going to spend the "drug money" or which girl you planned to send on the next "call." Short of

asking to be seated at another table, there is no foolproof way to discourage nosy eavesdroppers.

Dear Abby: My letter is in response to the one from the neighbors who complained about the noise their neighbor's children made playing basketball in the yard.

As a boy, many years ago, I probably annoyed our neighbors the same way. Now that boy has grown into a man, who has taken care of literally thousands of children in my practice of behavioral pediatrics. Experience tells me that if all youngsters would be outside playing basketball or any other activity of exertion, we would have far fewer academic and behavioral problems.

Approximately 75 percent of my patients never go outside to play. Many of them are addicted to video games, and some to television. The ramifications of this addiction are enormous.

These children tend to be more agitated and anxious. Their blood pressure and pulse are often increased. Their imagination is dulled. They have a higher risk of obesity, early onset diabetes, and future cardiovascular disease. Their sleep patterns are upset, and there is some evidence that they are at increased risk for seizures.

If the pounding of a basketball is annoying to some folks, they should step back and look at the big picture.

— Joel P. Sussman, M.D., FAAP, Columbia, S.C.

Dear Dr. Sussman: Thank you for an important letter. As some readers pointed out, the complainer should be thankful the neighbor children are involved in activities as healthy as athletics. People who can't stand the sound of children playing should relocate to a development for seniors.

Letters for this column — with your name and phone number — should be addressed to Dear Abby, P.O. Box 69460, Los Angeles, CA 90069. Readers can write to Abby on the Internet at <http://www.uspspress.com/dearabby>. Universal Press Syndicate

JUMBLE

Unscramble these four Jumbles, one letter to each square, to form four ordinary words.

ENSOO

YURLS

GROJAN

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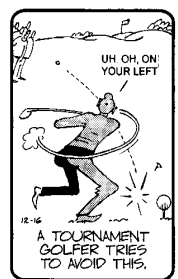
A: THE

A: THE

A: THE

THAT SCRAMBLED WORD GAME

by Henri Arnold and Mike Argilione



Now arrange the circled letters to form the surprise answer, as suggested by the above cartoon.

(Answers tomorrow)

Jumbles: CHUTE PLUME SHOULD WHEEZE
Answer: What the pie-eating champ did to the competition — CHEWED THEM UP

Matchmakers won't give it a rest

Dear Annie: I'm gay and have been in a loving relationship for over 20 years. My partner and I are only in our early 40s, but I know I have my soul mate and wish for no other. We are quiet, reserved types with no obvious traditional signs of attachment.

For most of our relationship, we have dreaded the inevitable questions: "Are you married?" and so forth. We usually respond "no" and leave it at that. We don't wish to elaborate. Frequently, though, this doesn't stop the matchmakers who want to introduce us to their single, female friends. We have found that however we answer, the matchmaker always reacts negatively.

Our relationship is not a secret, but it is private. We generally do not volunteer that we are a couple except in appropriate environments, because we can't be sure if our new (presumably straight) acquaintances will react positively. We simply don't find it necessary to let people know we're

anything other than roommates, and many acquaintances are very surprised when they learn the truth.

What can we say to these matchmakers who seem well-meaning, but are ultimately insensitive and prying?

— Won't Give the Game Away

Dear Game: Your signature indicates that you are not entirely comfortable being out of the closet, but that's your call. Most people would suspect that a man in his 40s who's been roommates with "Joe" for 20 years may be gay. For the clueless-yet-persistent matchmakers, simply say, "Thanks, but I'm already spoken for." Then excuse yourself and walk away.

Dear Annie: You printed a letter about an 8-year-old who was sexually harassed in school. I have an 8-year-old daughter who has sexually harassed others at her school. She is not a bully

nor was she abused. She has a neurological condition called Early Onset Bipolar Disorder.

Most people think bipolar means up-and-down moods. While this is true, the illness is neurologically based and, especially in children, can have many different symptoms, including inappropriate sexual behavior.

My daughter has taken medication since she was 4. It helps considerably, but she has occasional periods of instability.

For more information, please check out the Child and Adolescent Bipolar Foundation (www.bpkids.org), for parents of children who are bipolar, at 1000 Skokie Blvd., Suite 425, Wilmette, IL 60091.

— Bipolar Mom

Dear Mom: We hope your daughter's school has educated the other parents to be understanding about your situation.

Annie's Mailbox is written by Kathy Mitchell and Marcy Sugar, longtime editors of the Ann Landers column. Please e-mail your questions to anniesmailbox@comcast.net, or write to Annie's Mailbox, c/o Creators Syndicate, 5777 W. Century Blvd., Suite 700, Los Angeles, CA 90045.

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Family Circus

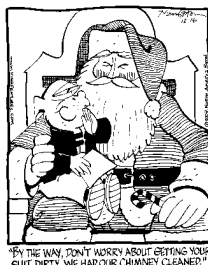


"We picked out the ones that say 'and children.' Can we hang them in our room?"

GRAFFITI

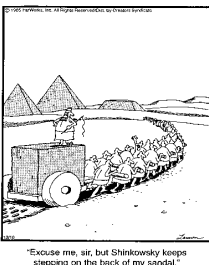


Domis the Menace



© Gary Larson

The Far Side



Non Sequitur



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NFL statistics

AFC individual leaders

Week 14 Quarterbacks					
	Att	Com	Yds	TD	Int
	418	288	3919	46	9
	363	237	2784	23	6
r, Pit.	248	164	2084	14	8
	439	288	3636	21	12
	383	227	3031	21	9
Y-J	274	181	1987	11	7
	249	154	1708	13	7
	379	237	2636	13	8
	393	244	3066	13	12
	424	242	3248	22	17

Rushers					
	Att	Yds	Avg	LG	TD
	289	1395	4.8	40	8
	306	1377	4.5	25t	10
	276	1309	4.7	44	10
	291	1194	4.1	52	7
	292	1143	3.9	42	14
	220	1067	4.9	52	6
	238	1059	4.4	42	1
	234	1046	4.5	51t	4
	240	922	3.8	41	9

Receivers					
No	Yds	Avg	LG	TD	
80	1151	14.4	53t	7	
79	934	11.8	37t	6	
74	946	12.8	32	5	
73	843	11.5	29	11	
71	1052	14.8	54t	5	
71	878	12.4	49	5	
70	896	12.8	59	13	
66	838	12.7	58	4	
65	1046	16.1	65	4	
63	1011	16.0	48t	8	

63	971	15.4	44	11
Punters				
No	Yds	LG	Avg	
56	2654	67	47.4	
38	1660	62	43.7	
57	2473	64	43.4	
55	2386	60	43.4	
63	2714	69	43.1	
65	2796	80	43.0	
64	2741	61	42.8	
44	1879	69	42.7	
68	2863	66	42.1	

Punt Returners					
	No	Yds	Avg	LG	TD
	29	323	11.1	44	0
	18	196	10.9	46	0
	50	516	10.3	78t	2
	21	212	10.1	30	0
	23	227	9.9	50	0
	28	258	9.2	86t	1
	31	284	9.2	37	0
	35	312	8.9	35	0
	24	212	8.8	32	0
	27	225	8.3	46	0

Kickoff Returners				
	No	Yds	Avg	LG TD
	43	1139	26.5	104t 3
	21	527	25.1	41 0
	54	1347	24.9	96t 1
	45	1118	24.8	87t 1
E.	39	966	24.8	93t 1
	40	923	23.1	93t 1
	51	1136	22.3	49 0
	42	931	22.2	64 0
n.	21	463	22.0	34 0
	17	374	22.0	40 0

Scoring Touchdowns					
	TD	Rush	Rec	Ret	Pts
D.	15	14	1	0	90
	14	14	0	0	84
	13	0	13	0	78
	12	12	0	0	72
	12	10	2	0	72
	11	10	1	0	66
	11	0	11	0	66
	11	0	11	0	66
	10	10	0	0	62
	9	8	1	0	54
L.	9	9	0	0	54
	9	0	9	0	54
	9	0	9	0	54

Week 14 Kicking			
PAT	FG	LG	FG
Vinateri, N.E.	29	29	29
Stacy, Ind.	28	28	28
Stacy, Ind.	25	25	25
Stacy, Ind.	25	25	25
Stacy, Ind.	25	25	25
Stacy, Ind.	25	25	25
Stacy, Ind.	25	25	25
Stacy, Ind.	25	25	25
Stacy, Ind.	25	25	25
Stacy, Ind.	25	25	25

Team statistics

OFFENSE

Indians	Yards	Rush	Pass
Kansas City	4161	1596	2565
San Diego	3556	1282	2274
New England	3556	1282	2274
San Diego	3556	1282	2274
New York Jets	3556	1282	2274
San Diego	3556	1282	2274
Cincinnati	3556	1282	2274
San Diego	3556	1282	2274
San Diego	3556	1282	2274
San Diego	3556	1282	2274
San Diego	3556	1282	2274

DEFENSE

Pittsburgh	Yards	Rush	Pass
Denver	2574	997	1577
Baltimore	2574	997	1577
Baltimore	2574	997	1577
San Diego	2574	997	1577
San Diego	2574	997	1577
San Diego	2574	997	1577
San Diego	2574	997	1577
San Diego	2574	997	1577
San Diego	2574	997	1577
San Diego	2574	997	1577
San Diego	2574	997	1577

NFC individual leaders

Week 14 Quarterbacks					
	Att	Com	Yds	TD	Int
in.	446	311	3729	31	10
	431	277	3616	29	6
	273	190	2193	16	9
	419	272	3289	17	12
	440	277	3160	23	13
	277	174	2054	6	4
ar.	424	243	3025	21	14
Sea.	417	236	2990	18	13
	286	164	2124	11	10
	325	198	2169	10	10

Rushers					
	Att	Yds	Avg	LG	TD
ea.	285	1385	4.9	44	12
	258	1238	4.8	72t	10
	298	1173	3.9	64t	5
	219	992	4.5	90t	6
	178	859	4.8	74	3
	109	821	7.5	58	2
	194	788	4.1	60	7
hi.	165	764	4.6	50	3
	202	732	3.6	29t	0

O.	187	717	3.8	26	8
Receivers					
No	Yds	Avg	LG	TD	
81	1184	14.6	57	9	
76	821	10.8	45	1	
75	1176	15.7	59t	14	
74	1086	14.7	75t	8	
74	1035	14.0	56t	6	
72	1071	14.9	56	4	
70	1058	15.1	79t	10	
70	988	14.1	56	4	
Car.	69	1060	15.4	51	11

Punters				
	No	Yds	LG	Avg
Car.	60	2662	65	44.4
	61	2705	63	44.3
	90	3990	61	44.3
	66	2861	60	43.3
	87	3771	58	43.3
	40	1733	63	43.3
	78	3352	57	43.0
	56	2389	62	42.7
	62	2620	68	42.3

62 2597 55 41.9					
Punt Returners					
	No	Yds	Avg	LG	TD
Det.	24	316	13.2	83t	2
	31	402	13.0	75t	1
Chi.	37	390	10.5	75t	1
	24	252	10.5	43	0
	17	173	10.2	55	0
	20	197	9.9	91t	1
	31	266	8.6	71t	1
	19	162	8.5	43	0
	23	180	7.8	20	0
	24	333	6.3	20	0

Kickoff Returns					
	No	Yds	Avg	LG	TD
Det.	41	1092	26.6	99t	2
	17	448	26.4	71	0
	21	552	26.3	38	0
	26	675	26.0	59	0
	18	428	23.8	70	0
	41	964	23.5	62	0
ar.	23	539	23.4	49	0
	27	619	22.9	66	0
	46	1052	22.9	51	0
	31	708	22.8	73	0

Scoring Touchdowns					
	TD	Rush	Rec	Ret	Pts
ea.	16	12	4	0	96
	14	0	14	0	84
	11	10	1	0	66
Car.	11	0	11	0	66
	10	0	10	0	60
	10	7	3	0	60
	10	0	10	0	60
	9	0	9	0	56
	9	9	0	0	54
hi.	9	3	6	0	54
Kicking					

Week 14 Kicking			
PAT	FG	LG	FG
Akers, Phil.	38	38	29
Longwell, G.B.	38	38	29
Longwell, G.B.	38	38	29
Longwell, G.B.	38	38	29
Longwell, G.B.	38	38	29
Longwell, G.B.	38	38	29
Longwell, G.B.	38	38	29
Longwell, G.B.	38	38	29
Longwell, G.B.	38	38	29
Longwell, G.B.	38	38	29
Longwell, G.B.	38	38	29

Team statistics

OFFENSE

Minnesota	Yards	Rush	Pass
Green Bay	3955	1192	2763
Seattle	3955	1192	2763
Seattle	3955	1192	2763
Seattle	3955	1192	2763
Seattle	3955	1192	2763
Seattle	3955	1192	2763
Seattle	3955	1192	2763
Seattle	3955	1192	2763
Seattle	3955	1192	2763
Seattle	3955	1192	2763
Seattle	3955	1192	2763

DEFENSE

Pittsburgh	Yards	Rush	Pass
Washington	2618	852	1766
Washington	2618	852	1766
Washington	2618	852	1766
Washington	2618	852	1766
Washington	2618	852	1766
Washington	2618	852	1766
Washington	2618	852	1766
Washington	2618	852	1766
Washington	2618	852	1766
Washington	2618	852	1766
Washington	2618	852	1766

Lions driving Detroit offense

BY LARRY LAGE

The Associated Press

ALLEN PARK, Mich. — The Detroit Lions have been looking for a running back since Barry Sanders suddenly retired five years ago.

Their search might have ended when they drafted Kevin Jones. The rookie running back has been the lone bright spot on offense for the reeling Lions, who have lost six of seven games since their 4-2 start.

Jones, who was chosen with the 30th pick of last April's draft after starring at Virginia Tech, has run for an NFL-best 551 yards in the past four games, including 156 and 196 yards rushing and two touchdowns the past two weeks — even against defenses with eight-man fronts.

"That's a testament to his running and the offensive line blocking," guard Damien Woody said. "The encouraging thing is we're still running the ball effectively against eight in the box."

Despite being slowed by a sprained right ankle and limited playing time early in the season, Jones ranks fifth among NFC running backs — first among all rookies — with 859 yards rushing.

He won't match Sanders' rookie total of 1,470 yards rushing. But he has surpassed Sanders' best single-game performance in 1989 and has become the first Lions rookie with back-to-back 150-yard rushing games.

If he runs for 150 yards Sunday at home against Minnesota, he will be just the ninth player in NFL history, and the first rookie, to do it at least three games in a row.

He has produced since coach Steve Yocum took over to get Jones the ball more often, he shared time with Artise Pryor and Shawn Bryson early in the season. In the past five games, Jones has averaged about 22 carries after getting no more than 15 carries or 65 yards in any of the first eight games.

"We've been stubborn with it," Martucci said. "I was telling you



Despite sharing carries early in the season, Lions running back Kevin Jones is fifth in the

Duckett to sit out after knee surgery

Falcons RB will return for playoffs

The Associated Press

ATLANTA — Falcons running back T.J. Duckett is expected to miss one game after undergoing surgery on his left knee on Tuesday.

Atlanta coach Jim Mora said the surgery to repair the meniscus cartilage in Duckett's left knee "went very well."

"We don't expect him to miss more than just this game," said Mora of Saturday night's home game against Carolina.

The surgery comes two days after Duckett rushed for a team-record four touchdowns in a 35-10 victory over Oakland that clinched the South Division title.

Duckett, bothered by persistent swelling in his left knee, had hoped to put off the arthroscopic surgery until after the season.

Because the Falcons (10-3) clinched the playoff berth Sunday with three games left in the regular season and could qualify for a first-round bye in the playoffs — giving Duckett another week to heal — the team decided to proceed with the surgery.

"I think it was clicking or just bothering him," Mora said.

Erickson staying with 49ers

ASHBURN, Va. — San Francisco coach Dennis Erickson said Wednesday he is no longer a candidate to become coach at Mississippi.

Erickson met with Mississippi's athletic director and chancellor for two hours in Santa Clara, Calif., on Tuesday night, but he was not offered the job.

"It wasn't the right fit either way," Erickson said. "It wasn't the right fit for me, and it wasn't the right fit for Ole Miss."

Erickson has three seasons and \$7.5 million remaining on his contract with the 49ers, but his future has been in question during a difficult season. San Francisco (7-2-1), the worst record in the NFC.

Fisher to talk with McNair about ending season early

NASHVILLE, Tenn. — Tennessee quarterback Steve McNair could sit out the final three games of the season with a bruised stomach that has kept him from playing the past two games.

"I've never owned a team that I've seen anybody anymore to getther than what all of the people are in place on this team at this time," McNair said. "Players, coaches, staff, all together."

Yes, solace comes from solidarity — and from the standings. The Vikings still can take the NFC North — needing only to win their three remaining games, regardless of what the Packers do. Even just one more victory could get Minnesota a wild-card spot.

NFL Briefs

With the Titans (4-9) officially eliminated from playoff contention, coach Jeff Fisher said Tuesday that he will talk with McNair in the next few days to decide the immediate future.

Fisher has said McNair will need up to eight weeks of inactivity for his chest to heal. Sitting McNair for the rest of the season would give the quarterback a five-week head start on deciding whether he wants to return for 2005.

Browns lose another lineman

CLEVELAND — The Browns placed center Jeff Faine on injured reserve Tuesday, the 18th player and ninth starter Cleveland has lost for the season.

Faine injured his ankle in last week's loss at Buffalo on the same play that ended quarterback Jeff Garcia's season. Garcia was placed on injured reserve with a torn knee ligament.

Quarterback Rex Ryan is Cleveland's only remaining starter on the offensive line.

Bucs put tight end Heller on IR

TAMPA, Fla. — The Tampa Bay Buccaneers placed tight end Will Heller on injured reserve Tuesday with a sprained hip and activated rookie tight end Nate Lawrie from the practice squad.

Heller had 12 receptions for 98 yards and one touchdown in 10 games this season.

Niners put CB Plummer on injured reserve

SANTA CLARA, Calif. — San Francisco cornerback Ahmed Plummer, who hasn't played since Oct. 17, was placed on injured reserve Tuesday because a bulging disc in his neck.

Plummer, a five-year veteran who signed a \$25 million contract in March, has been bothered by neck problems since last season. The 49ers (2-11) hoped he could return this year, but Plummer's neck hasn't responded well enough to rehabilitation.

Indeed, three of the five defeats during this skid have come by a total of 10 points. Moss, a nonfactor for five games with a partially torn hamstring, is just about at full strength. Though the offense has just three second-half points over the last two games, quarterback Daunte Culpepper is enjoying a career season and he's got a very capable core of running backs.

And while the defense continues to self-destruct in the first half, the Vikings have given up a



San Francisco 49ers running back Kevan Barlow (32) didn't play last Sunday because of a concussion and lost his starting job as a result.

New diminished role irks 49ers RB Barlow

BY GREG BEACHAM

The Associated Press

SANTA CLARA, Calif. — Kevan Barlow can think of more than 20 million reasons he should still be the San Francisco 49ers' starting running back.

Barlow is upset with coach Dennis Erickson's decision to start Maurice Hicks against the Washington Redskins on Saturday, even though Hicks had the best performance by a San Francisco runner this season in last week's win at Arizona.

Hicks rushed for 139 yards in his first NFL start while Barlow was sidelined by a concussion. Barlow is ready to return this week, and Hicks is hampered by a rib injury — but Hicks will start if he's healthy enough.

"I was very disappointed. I didn't agree with that," Barlow said Tuesday. "I think I deserve to be the starter, but I've said from day one I support Coach Erickson, and do whatever he wants to do."

Barlow repeatedly cited the organization's commitment to him as the reason for his loyalty. Barlow is in the form of a \$20 million contract with \$8 million in guaranteed money — as one reason he should keep the job.

"They invested in me," Barlow said. "They want me to be the guy

out there ... and I want to do the job. I'm 25. I ain't going nowhere no time soon. I'm happy to be here."

But his numbers on the field haven't supported the digits on his paycheck. Barlow averages just 3.2 yards per carry this season, with 629 yards and six touchdowns. He's unlikely even to match the 1,024 yards he gained last season while splitting playing time with Garrison Hearst.

Erickson said both Barlow and Hicks will get a chance to show what they can do against the Redskins' impressive defense.

"They are both going to play," Erickson said. "And then when [Barlow] gets an opportunity to play, go out and earn the position back. In my book, that's just how I look at it right now at this part of the season."

Barlow's frustration has grown during San Francisco's 2-11 season. He has defended his play and indirectly criticized his offensive line — but after he jokingly suggested last week that the 49ers should use all their upcoming draft picks on linemen, he apologized to his blockers.

"I've grown with this offensive line from day one, and they're starting to block, and I think I should be out there with them," Barlow said.

Dolphins talk with LSU coach about job

The Associated Press

BATON ROUGE, La. — LSU coach Nick Saban has talked to the Miami Dolphins about their vacant head coaching position.

In a statement issued by LSU on Wednesday, Saban described the talks as "a preliminary conversation with the Dolphins to exchange ideas about their head coaching position."

"No decisions were made at this meeting and they will continue their search for a coach," Saban said. "I will continue to be committed to LSU, our football program and totally focused on our bowl game versus Iowa."

LSU (9-2) meets Iowa (9-2) on Jan. 11 in the Capital One Bowl.

Dolphins President Eddie Jones said he and owner Wayne Huizenga met with Saban, but he did not divulge any other specific details on the meeting and, like Saban, stressed that no choices have been made.

"In keeping with our policy to conduct this search with integrity prior to speaking with Coach Saban we did contact LSU interim chancellor William L. Jenkins to inform him of our meeting," Jones said in a statement released by the team.

Dolphins interim coach Jim Bates said he hasn't yet discussed the prospects of leading the team in 2005 with Huizenga, but added that conversation will take place later this week.

Saban notified LSU in writing about the meeting with the Dolphins, said athletics director Skip Bertman. Bertman said Saban "has been forthright in his communication with the university about this and I support him in any direction that he may take."

After the season ended, Saban resigned as Miami coach in November after the Dolphins' 1-8 start and was replaced on an interim basis by Bates, the team's defensive coordinator.

Haze: Weak NFC North favors Vikings

HAZE, FROM BACK PAGE

"I've never owned a team that I've seen anybody anymore to getther than what all of the people are in place on this team at this time," McNair said. "Players, coaches, staff, all together."

Yes, solace comes from solidarity — and from the standings. The Vikings still can take the NFC North — needing only to win their three remaining games, regardless of what the Packers do. Even just one more victory could get Minnesota a wild-card spot.

The Associated Press

ALAMEDA, Calif. — The Oakland Raiders are close to signing placekicker Sebastian Janikowski to a five-year contract extension.

"We're trying to finalize some loose ends," player personnel chief Michael Lombardi said Tuesday.

The deal should be completed by the end of the week, Lombardi said, but did not wish to elaborate on the extension.

The 26-year-old Janikowski,

the Raiders' first-round draft pick in 2000, has converted all but three of his 22 field-goal attempts this season for the Raiders (4-9). He is 112-for-140 in his career.

He hit a 52-yarder during Sunday's 35-10 loss at Atlanta and has made one other beyond 50 yards this season.

He has eclipsed the performance standards in the initial eight-year deal he signed as a rookie in 2000, allowing him to void the final three years of the contract and become a free agent after this season.

Raiders near deal with kicker

SEC will fine schools when fans rush field

The Associated Press

BIRMINGHAM, Ala. — Southeastern Conference schools could face fines of as much as \$50,000 if fans come onto the field or court during football or basketball games.

The policy was approved by all SEC schools and took effect Dec. 1. It states that "access to competition areas shall be limited to participating student-athletes, coaches, officials, support personnel and properly credentialed individuals at all times."

The policy imposes fines on schools for violations in football and men's and women's basketball. The penalties range from \$5,000 for a first offense to fines of up to \$25,000 for a second offense and up to \$50,000 for a third and subsequent offense. The size of the penalty will be determined by the commissioner.

"This policy is designed to create a safe environment for our student-athletes, coaches, staff and fans," SEC commissioner Mike Slive said Tuesday. "Our institutions felt that this was a step that needed to be taken."

Fans who violate the rules can be kicked out, arrested and kept from purchasing tickets. Students may also be punished by their schools for violating the rules.

CIAA picks Charlotte for basketball tournaments

HAMPTON, Va. — Charlotte beat out fellow North Carolina rival Raleigh to host the Central Intercollegiate Athletic Association's men's and women's basketball tournament from 2006 through 2008.

The decision was based on a majority vote Tuesday of the 12-member institutions' presidents and chancellors.

The 2005 tournament will be played in Raleigh, where they have been since 2000.

Starting in March, the CIAA men's tournament will enjoy expanded television exposure, as ESPN added last week to a three-year deal to televise games. That makes the CIAA the first NCAA Division II conference to have its games televised by ESPN.

Sports briefs

as part of its Championship Week coverage.

The conference's 12 schools are Bowie State, Elizabeth City State, Fayetteville State, Johnson C. Smith University, Livingston, North Carolina Central, St. Augustine's, St. Paul's College, Shaw, Virginia State, Virginia Union, and Winston-Salem State.

Bush, not Leinart, chosen USC's MVP

LOS ANGELES — Heisman Trophy-winning quarterback Matt Leinart wasn't even selected the most valuable player on his own team.

That honor went to running back Reggie Bush at No. 1 Southern California's annual awards banquet Tuesday night. Bush finished fifth in the Heisman voting. Seniors Shaun Cody and Mike Patterson shared USC's defensive linemen of the year award; redshirt freshman offensive tackle Sam Baker was voted the team's offensive lineman of the year; and redshirt freshman tailback Desmond Reed was the special teams player of the year.

Linebackers Matt Grooved and Lofa Tuatu shared the most inspirational player award.

The awards were determined by a vote of the players.

Austria to choose bid city for 2014 Games next month

VIENNA, Austria — Austria's Olympic Committee said Wednesday it'll decide next month between Innsbruck and Salzburg for the country's 2014 Winter Olympics bid.

The committee will pick the candidate Jan. 24, the statement said.

Innsbruck hosted the 1964 and the 1976 Winter Olympics.

Salzburg was shortlisted as a candidate for the 2010 games, but finished a distant third — behind the winner, Vancouver, and Pyeongchang, South Korea, which has indicated it, too, might try again for the 2014 Games.

BY BRETT MARTEL

The Associated Press

NEW ORLEANS — Southern Mississippi coach Jeff Bower relied on an array of linebacker blitzes to slow down freshman running back Jamario Thomas.

The scheme stifled North Texas' passing game as well.

Southern Miss ended Thomas' streak of 100-yard games at seven, sacked quarterback Scott Hall six times and got a 62-yard touchdown on Michael Boley's interception of an attempted screen pass. The result was a 31-10 victory in the New Orleans Bowl on Tuesday night, Southern Mississippi's first postseason triumph in four years.

"The key was getting pressure on the quarterback and make him throw quick. No quarterback wants to be out of rhythm," Bower said. "Sometimes when you do that you get a little more effort. When you blitz and go fast you maybe pick up the tempo a little bit."

Boley, named MVP of the first bowl of the postseason, made eight tackles, including two sacks.

As for the Southern Miss defense, Dustin Almond threw for 247 yards. He had a touchdown pass and ran for a score in the opening quarter, giving the Golden Eagles an early lead they never relinquished.

North Texas' season had been defined by adversity overcome.

Quarterback Andrew Smith died in a car accident just before training camp, starting running back Patrick Cobbins injured his knee in the second game and never returned, and the Mean Green lost their first four games before winning seven straight to earn their fourth straight trip to the New Orleans Bowl.

But Southern Miss (7-5), which narrowly lost to No. 4 California earlier this month, outplayed North Texas throughout. USM finished with a 403-212 advantage in total yardage, with Southern Miss

gaining 104 yards on 14 carries.

North Texas, the four-time Sun Belt Conference champion, dropped to 1-3 in the New Orleans Bowl. Thomas, a freshman who missed his final regular-season game with a sore hamstring, finished with 92 yards on 30 carries.

"The biggest thing they did defensively was sending rovers off the outside edges, which gave us problems in the running and passing games," North Texas coach Darrell Dickley said. "We didn't play our best football. We couldn't run like we're accustomed to."

Hall was held to just 57 yards passing through three quarters.

He finished 15-for-30 for 134 yards and two interceptions.

"They brought it today," Hall said. "Guys were coming off the edge all night. They took away our play-action game."



North Texas quarterback Scott Hall is sacked by Southern Mississippi linebacker Michael Boley during second half of the New Orleans Bowl.

Southern Miss. 31, N. Texas 10

Southern Miss. 14 0 14-31

North Texas 0 10 0-31

First Quarter

USM—Graves 37 yards from Almond (McCauley kick), 11:07

USM—Almond 1 run (McCauley kick), 6:13

Second Quarter

USM—FG McCauley 46, 15:50

Fourth Quarter

USM—Boley 62 interception return (McCauley kick), 12:52

USM—Moore 1 run (McCauley kick), 12:06

NT—Quinn 10 pass from Hall (Bazaldua kick), 3:11

4-7-23.

First downs

Rushes-yards

Passing

Comp-Att-int

Return yards

Punts-Avg

Fumbles-Lost

Penalties-Yards

Time of Possession

INDIVIDUAL STATISTICS

Rushing—Southern Miss, Harris 14-94,

Moore 1-33, Thomas 4-24, Weakley 1-2, Al-

mond 3-49; N. Texas, Quinn 8-80, Bourne 2-33,

Moore 1-1, Mitchell 1-1, Hall 8 (-minus 16),

16-30-1-24; N. Texas, Hall 15-30-1-14.

Receiving—Southern Miss, Cunningham

5-50, Graves 1-16, Perkins 2-25, Thomas 2-37,

Williams 1-7, Harris 1-35, Lawrence 1-17,

Young 1-7; N. Texas, Quinn 8-80, Bourne 2-33,

Culbertson 1-16, Mitchell 1-8, Jackson 1-7, Thomas 1-4.



Top Scores for Week 14

266	Chipboudy	Camp Anaconda
266	kiko25	USARPIT
264	MYCHAPSG&M	111th SIG BN
264	MIKE_V.01	5th Signal Cdn
260	Eddie the Q	615th MP
260	BigFrankfromTexas	470th medical clinic
260	MP5niper	US Delegation to NATO
260	cowboyfan74	69th Texas Co.
260	Stu	Sullivan Bks.
260	jeremy	FL Riley



Best Overall Scores

2430	STELFROGWOOD	MAG-12
2412	hnc237ar	hnc237ar
2418	Bone-Daddy	HQ, USARER, GF
2414	Jack58	422 ABS RAF Croughton
2398	Who Cares	MMF-1 DCSPER
2394	Joe Corleone	Misawa
2390	Jaguar One	DoDods
2384	SPIELMEISTER 04	Hohenfels
2382	Rambi	RAF Lakenheath
2378	BengalsAlltheWay	ECJ2-JAC-DSTE

See websites for official game rules.

Check this space every Thursday during the entire NFL season for the weeks Top Scores and Best Overall Scores during the NFL Challenge.

Washington's deal for Expos placed in jeopardy

D.C. council's ballpark-financing package could cause baseball to reopen search

BY BRETT ZONKGER

The Associated Press

WASHINGTON — Baseball fans in the nation's capital might not have long to cheer their new team.

The District of Columbia Council voted 7-6 Tuesday night to approve legislation that would finance construction of a ballpark.

But it contained a provision that could cause the baseball commissioner's office to reopen the search for a long-term home for the Expos franchise, which has been tentatively renamed the Nationals.

The legislation was amended to require private financing for at least half the stadium construction costs, a provision not contained in the September agreement between baseball and Wash-

ington Mayor Anthony A. Williams.

"We will review the amendments and the legislation as passed and have a response [Wednesday]," said Bob DuPuy, baseball's chief operating officer.

One response came almost immediately: The team postponed a news conference scheduled for Wednesday to await the new uniform. No explanation was given.

"I am not trying to kill the deal," said council chair Linda W. Cropp, who introduced the private financing measure. "I'm putting some teeth in it because I'm really disappointed with what I got from Major League Baseball."

The amendment passed on a 10-3 vote after Cropp threatened to withhold support from the overall package if the provision wasn't

approved. Cropp said she didn't think the change violated the city's agreement with baseball, but would pressure Williams to find a private financier.

Williams refused to answer questions after the vote.

"We'll have to see how baseball reacts," said Councilman Jack Evans, a baseball proponent. But Williams said the council will have to change the legislation to keep the deal alive.

"We'll have until the end of the year to change this," Evans said.

City Administrator Robert Babb said city negotiators were talking with baseball officials, but he didn't expect the owners to accept the change.

If the law stands, baseball's most responsive response would be to have the team play the 2005 season at Washington's RFK Stadium

while baseball's search committee resumes negotiations with cities that want the team.

One option could be Las Vegas, which was among the cities competing for the Expos and is still lobbying for a team. Las Vegas Mayor Oscar Goodman campaigned at last week's winter meetings, arriving accompanied by showgirls wearing feathered headresses.

Baseball opponents in Washington said the change makes the deal more equitable.

"We're asking for is private financing for half the stadium," said Councilman Adrian Fenty, who voted against the final legislation. "That shouldn't be a problem."

The Montreal Expos became the first major league team outside the United States when they

started play in 1969, but attendance at Olympic Stadium slumped over the past decade and the franchise was bought by the other 29 teams before the 2002 season. In 2003 and 2004, some of the team's home games were moved to Puerto Rico to raise revenue.

From the time baseball owners insisted a publicly financed stadium for the team be a component of any move.

When the council gave its initial approval to the law on Nov. 30, it called for the city to issue \$531 million in bonds to finance the plan. Baseball owners approved the Expos' move Dec. 2 on the condition that financing be put in place consistent with the deal, and that arrangements to move the team be completed by 2005 satisfied Baseball Commissioner Bud Selig.

Report: Renteria to sign with Boston

Red Sox say no deal in place yet, sign free-agent pitcher Halamia

The Associated Press

BOSTON — All-Star shortstop Edgar Renteria told The Boston Globe he has agreed to a \$40 million, four-year contract with the Red Sox, a report appeared on its Web site Wednesday.

Renteria, who played for St. Louis for the past six years, made the final out to win the World Series sweep of the Cardinals. He has a .289 career average and is a four-time All-Star and two-time Gold Glove winner.

Reached by the paper at his home in Colombia, Renteria said the World Series champions made the best offer.

"I like to play on a winning team like Boston, St. Louis or any team that has the opportunity to win," he was quoted as saying.

His decision came down to the two pennant winners, and he said the Red Sox were "more interested in my playing for them."

At a news conference with free agent pitcher John Halamia, who signed a one-year deal with the Sox on Wednesday, Red Sox President Larry Lucchino said the team was negotiating with the shortstop and Boston hoped to hold another news conference this week.

"An All-Star and Gold Glove infielder would be a great addition to this or any other team," Lucchino said.

Renteria replaces fellow Colombian Orlando Cabrera, who was acquired in a late-season trade and played a key role in Boston's championship run.

His contract also includes an option for 2009.

Halamia was 7-6 with a 4.70 ERA in 34 games for the Tampa Bay Devil Rays last season. He struck out 59 and walked 27 while allowing 17 homers in 118 1/3 innings. In a seven-year career with four teams, he is 53-43 with a 4.52 ERA.



Edgar Renteria

Union, owners resume talks about steroids

The Associated Press

NEW YORK — Lawyers for baseball's players' association and owners resumed Tuesday talks aimed at a new agreement to toughen rules on steroid testing.

Neither side commented on the session, which was described as an ongoing part of the process.

Baseball Commissioner Bud Selig wants more testing, harsher penalties and additional banned substances.

The executive board of the players' association last week gave its staff authorization to go ahead with the talks. The current agreement, criticized by management and politicians, runs through the 2006 season.

Union files grievance over Rockies' termination of Neagle

NEW YORK — The players' association filed a grievance Tuesday in an effort to overturn the Colorado Rockies' termination of Denny Neagle's contract.

Neagle is owed \$19 million under the \$51 million, five-year contract he signed in December 2000. Colorado terminated the agreement Dec. 6, three days after the oft-injured pitcher was cited for solicitation. Police said a woman in his car told him he had paid her \$40 for oral sex.

Colorado cited section 7(b) (1) of the Uniform Player Contract, which states the team can terminate the contract if a player "fails, refuse or neglect to conform his personal conduct to the standards of good citizenship and good sportsmanship or to keep himself in first-class physical condition."

A Rockies spokesman said the team had no further comment on Tuesday.

Martinez confirms agreement to sign with Mets

BY RONALD BLUM

The Associated Press

NEW YORK — Pedro Martinez confirmed Tuesday that he has agreed to join the New York Mets.

"I only hope to honor my contract and to fulfill the expectations," Martinez said on television in the Dominican Republic. "We got what we wanted. The team and I are happy with everything."

His agent, Fernando Cuza, told the Mets on Monday that he would attempt to work out a deal with them after New York guaranteed a fourth year. The deal for the pitcher who helped Boston win the World Series will be worth more than \$40 million.

"The bigger the contract, the bigger the responsibility," Martinez said.

Martinez said the sides still must determine the distribution of the money, and that he needs to pass a physical.

New York has not announced the deal, choosing to wait until an

Baseball free agent roundup

seven seasons with the Red Sox.

"My heart will always be with the Boston fans. I hope that everyone who truly loves me will still support me now that I won't be with the Red Sox," the three-time Cy Young Award winner said. Martinez rejected a \$40.5 million, three-year offer from the Red Sox, and the St. Louis Cardinals offered a four-year deal, a Mets official said Tuesday, speaking on condition of anonymity.

Cardinals General Manager Bud Jocketty and Cuza didn't return telephone calls seeking comment.

Arizona, which had talked to the Yankees about trading Randy Johnson to New York, hasn't given up the deal, said a Yankees official.

"What we're prepared to do is to listen to anyone, and there have been other clubs who have expressed interest in Randy,"

managing partner Ken Kendrick said. "We're going to continue to do that, but it's an ultimate decision — if ever made — that needs we and Randy to get together and discuss it and get his representations." And we're not at that point yet."

Incumbent Diamondbacks chief executive officer Jeff Moard called Yankees President Randy Levine on Monday, a baseball official said on condition of anonymity. No new proposals were made, the official said.

New York had broken off talks Dec. 1, saying Arizona's asking price was too high.

Other teams pushed ahead with business. Anaheim agreed to a \$5 million, one-year contract with pitcher aul Byrd and traded Ramon Ortiz to Cincinnati for prospect Dustin Moseley in a swap of right-handers.

A day after San Francisco finalized a deal with catcher Mike Matheny, the Giants placed incumbent catcher A.J. Pierzynski on waivers. San Francisco also agreed to a minor league contract

with left-hander Jeff Fassero, and St. Louis reached a preliminary agreement on a \$600,000, one-year contract with catcher Einar Diaz.

Third baseman Corey Koskie and Toronto finalized their \$17 million, three-year deal, second baseman Jose Hernandez and Cleveland completed their \$1.8 million, one-year agreement and Arizona announced a one-year deal with shortstop Royce Clayton worth \$1.35 million.

Also, first baseman Richie Sexton will have additional medical tests before Seattle finalizes his contract, a baseball official said.

Anaheim added Byrd and remains interested in Matt Clement, who is talking to the Red Sox and other teams. Byrd, 34, was 8-7 with a 3.94 ERA in 19 starts for Atlanta last season. He began the season on the 60-day disabled list recovering from reconstructive elbow surgery and was activated June 19.

AP Sports Writer Enrique Rojas in the Dominican Republic contributed to this report

**MLB
briefs**

NBA scoreboard

Eastern Conference

Atlantic Division			
W	L	Pct	GB
New York	10	524	
New Jersey	9	520	1
Philadelphia	9	520	1
Pittsburgh	9	520	1
Toronto	6	434	5

Southeast Division			
W	L	Pct	GB
Miami	16	696	—
Orlando	13	632	2
Charlotte	13	632	2
Atlanta	4	263	19

Central Division			
W	L	Pct	GB
Cleveland	13	619	—
Minneapolis	10	524	2
Detroit	6	500	2 1/2
St. Louis	5	465	3
Chicago	4	251	21

Western Conference

Southwest Division			
W	L	Pct	GB
San Antonio	17	673	—
Dallas	12	629	3
Houston	12	629	3
Memphis	9	531	6 1/2
New Orleans	8	500	8 1/2

Northwest Division			
W	L	Pct	GB
Seattle	14	618	—
Minnesota	14	657	3 1/2
Portland	14	657	3 1/2
Utah	10	500	7
Vancouver	12	465	8

Pacific Division			
W	L	Pct	GB
Phoenix	3	357	—
Sacramento	15	616	7 1/2
Golden State	14	616	7 1/2
LA Clippers	11	524	11
LA Lakers	10	533	12

Tuesday's games			
Philadelphia 110, Detroit 97			
Charlotte 94, New Orleans 93			
New York 107, New Jersey 97			
Atlanta 108, Orlando 97			
San Antonio 107, Dallas 94			
Utah 93, LA Clippers 91			
Seattle 106, LA Lakers 93			

Wednesday's games			
Denver at Boston			
Miami at Washington			
Chicago at Cleveland			
Memphis at Toronto			
Golden State at New Orleans			
Orlando at San Antonio			

Thursday's games			
Cleveland at Detroit			
Milwaukee at Chicago			
LA Lakers at Sacramento			

Friday's games			
Toronto at Indiana			
New York at Philadelphia			
Portland at Atlanta			
Denver at Memphis			
San Antonio at New Orleans			
Golden State at Minnesota			
San Jose at Houston			
Phoenix at Seattle			
Washington at LA Lakers			

Saturday's games			
LA Lakers at Seattle			
LA Clippers at Golden State			
LA Lakers at Seattle			

Sunday's games			
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LA Clippers at Golden State			
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Wednesday's games			
LA Lakers at Seattle			
LA Clippers at Golden State			
LA Lakers at Seattle			

Bobcats 94, Hornets 93 (OT)

New Orleans			
W	L	Pct	GB
New Orleans	10	524	
Atlanta	9	520	1
Charlotte	9	520	1
Orlando	9	520	1
Philadelphia	9	520	1
Pittsburgh	9	520	1
Toronto	6	434	5

Southeast Division			
W	L	Pct	GB
Miami	16	696	—
Orlando	13	632	2
Charlotte	13	632	2
Atlanta	4	263	19

Central Division			
W	L	Pct	GB
Cleveland	13	619	—
Minneapolis	10	524	2
Detroit	6	500	2 1/2
St. Louis	5	465	3
Chicago	4	251	21

Western Conference

Southwest Division			
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Pacific Division			
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Tuesday's games			
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San Antonio 107, Dallas 94			
Utah 93, LA Clippers 91			
Seattle 106, LA Lakers 93			

Wednesday's games			
Denver at Boston			
Miami at Washington			
Chicago at Cleveland			
Memphis at Toronto			
Golden State at New Orleans			
Orlando at San Antonio			

Thursday's games			
Cleveland at Detroit			
Milwaukee at Chicago			
LA Lakers at Sacramento			

Friday's games			
Toronto at Indiana			
New York at Philadelphia			
Portland at Atlanta			
Denver at Memphis			
San Antonio at New Orleans			
Golden State at Minnesota			
San Jose at Houston			
Phoenix at Seattle			
Washington at LA Lakers			

Saturday's games			
LA Lakers at Seattle			
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LA Clippers at Golden State			
LA Lakers at Seattle			

Tuesday's games			
LA Lakers at Seattle			
LA Clippers at Golden State			
LA Lakers at Seattle			

Wednesday's games			
LA Lakers at Seattle			
LA Clippers at Golden State			
LA Lakers at Seattle			

Timberwolves 100, Blazers 89

Portland			
W	L	Pct	GB
Portland	10	524	
Seattle	9	520	1

Louisville's tuneup for UK is ragged

The Associated Press

LOUISVILLE, Ky. — Larry O'Bannon wasn't concerned about a possible career-high.

He had 25 points Tuesday night to lead No. 13 Louisville to an 85-51 victory over North Carolina A&T on Tuesday night. That was one point shy of the senior swingman's best performance, last season at Memphis.

"Some of the fellows pointed it out," said O'Bannon, who was 10-for-14 from the field and had 11 rebounds in leading the Cardinals to their fifth straight victory.

"I really wasn't worried about it."

Francisco Garcia added 12 points and Ellis Myles had 11 points and 10 rebounds for Louisville, which shot 43.2 percent from the field (29-for-67) but only 18-for-33 from the free throw line.

The Cardinals turned the ball over 22 times but forced North Carolina A&T into 24 turnovers and out-rebounded the Aggies 38-40.

But the Cardinals gave up 19 offensive rebounds, and that didn't please Louisville coach Rick Pitino, whose team hosts No. 9 Kentucky on Saturday.

"We called a timeout to specifically talk about blocking out, and the very next time down the floor, we didn't do it," Pitino said. "We're still not blocking out like we are supposed to. We got a 'W' tonight, but we didn't play our 'A' game."

North Carolina A&T (1-8) shot 28.1 percent for the game (20-for-71), including 3-for-18 from three-point range.

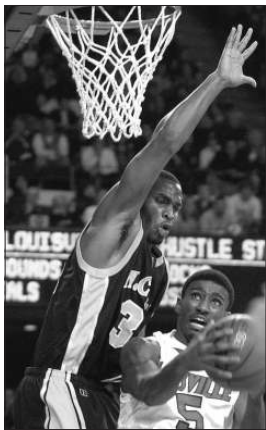
The Cardinals (6-1) broke from a 12-point half-time lead with a 12-5 run that put them ahead 52-33 with 14½ minutes to play.

"We just had more manpower," O'Bannon said. "They played hard, they played their hearts out, we just had more talent than they did."

Sean Booker's three-pointer with 9:16 to play got the Aggies (1-8) within 62-45, but a 9-2 run by Louisville pushed the lead to 70-47 with 7:45 to play. Louisville had two three-pointers and O'Bannon added a layup during the spurt.

Booker, a Louisville native, led the Aggies with 19 points while Steven Koger had 13.

"Louisville is a great team, they are very smart



North Carolina A&T's Jeff Alvis, right, challenges a shot by Louisville's Taguan Dean on Tuesday. Louisville shot 54 percent from the line (18 of 33), committed 22 turnovers and gave up 19 offensive rebounds.

with the ball," said Aggies coach Jerry Eaves, a former Louisville assistant who played on the Cardinals' 1980 NCAA championship team. "Right now, they are a little broken down. They don't have the depth that they need."

In Tuesday's other Top 25 game:

No. 7 Duke 88, Illinois-Chicago 55: Sheldon Williams had 23 points, 14 rebounds and seven blocked shots while J.J. Redick added 21 points for host Duke, which improved to 7-0 for the fourth time in five seasons and blocked a school-record 18 shots.

Duke shot 49 percent and used a 21-0 run spanning halftime to turn the game into rout. The Blue Devils held the Flames (3-4) to one field goal over a 7½-minute span.

Illinois-Chicago lost 60-59 to No. 3 Georgia Tech in the season opener.

Majerus reportedly set to coach USC next year

By PAUL GUTIERREZ
Los Angeles Times

LOS ANGELES — Former Utah coach and current ESPN analyst Rick Majerus and USC officials were finalizing a deal Tuesday night that will have Majerus succeed as the new Trojans basketball coach in a news conference Wednesday, sources said.

Majerus, 56, who was in the Los Angeles area Tuesday night, did not return phone messages, while Daryl Gross, USC's senior associate athletic director, who has been handling the search, would not comment.

A source close to Majerus said the contract would be for five years at \$1 million a season, and although Majerus is expected to leave his job with ESPN immediately — it is not thought USC will be involved in any type of buyout with the cable network — he will not take over the program until after this season.

Majerus, who was the head coach at Utah for 15 years, Ball State for two and Marquette for three. He has a career winning percentage of .742 (442-147) and has taken his teams to the postseason 15 times, going 18-11 in the NCAA tournament with four Sweet 16 appearances.

He left Utah abruptly in January after suffering severe chest pains. He had already undergone heart bypass surgery, missing most of the 1989-90 season at Utah, and has battled weight problems his entire career.

Interim USC coach Jim Shaia, who was installed by Athletic Director Mike Garret after firing Henry Bibby on Dec. 6, will continue to run the team along with Majerus's old staff. It is not known how closely Majerus will monitor the program under Shaia or whether he can actively recruit.

The Trojans host Western Michigan in a nonconference game Saturday before departing for Hawaii on Sunday for the Rainbow Classic.

"What I told the team was that we can just control what we can — the rest of the season," Shaia said. "We still need to just focus on Western Michigan. If the Majerus hiring is the case, then that's not until next ... April. It doesn't affect the season."

"I think everyone's excited about the season. We're a senior-oriented team, so we're not going to worry about next season until it comes."

With six seniors on the roster and with sophomore Rodrick Stewart and freshman Emanuel Willis having received their releases from the school, and sophomore Lodrick Stewart threatening to transfer on numerous occasions, Majerus could inherit a team with only three returnees — guards Gabe Pruitt, Dwayne Shackelford and Nick Young. USC signed two high school players in November — shooting guard Sead Ozdic and small forward Mike Freeman.

Majerus, though, should get to coach in the Galen Center, USC's campus arena scheduled to open in two years.

"I never heard about him," Lodrick Stewart said of Majerus. "I'm just trying to finish out this season. There's been too much stuff going on. We should be 2-0 under Coach Shaia. He's a good coach. I really like him. I wish he could stay our coach."

The last week of turmoil has taken its toll on the players, Stewart added.

"I feel like the Lakers right now," he said. "I've never been through this much in basketball in my life. Crazy."

Nets play waiting game with Kidd

By TOM CANAVAN
The Associated Press

EAST RUTHERFORD, N.J. — Having Jason Kidd available for roughly 20 minutes a night is costing the New Jersey Nets.

The New York Knicks took advantage of Kidd's rationed minutes to get back in the game early and capitalized on a 15-minute span in which J-Kidd and company couldn't buy a basket.

"I can only play 20 minutes, so we can't say, 'What if I played more minutes, we would win,'" Kidd said after the Nets lost 87-79 on Tuesday night. "We had a great opportunity and we went cold longer than they did. As a team we have to learn from this."

The problem facing Kidd and Nets coach Lawrence Frank is how to deal with his limited playing time.

Kidd had knee surgery in July and underwent a long rehabilitation. He did not return to action until a week ago. He played in only his fifth game Tuesday.

From the start, doctors limited him to 20 minutes, although Kidd went 28 in an overtime win over former Nets teammate Byron Scott and his New Orleans Hornets.

Frank has kept Kidd in check since that game.

"It's not a dilemma," Frank said. "That's why the situation is, and no one is complaining about it. The guy who has it hardest is Jason."

Kidd started and played well as New Jersey took an 18-7 lead.

But he went to the bench with 6:28 to play in the first quarter and did not get back into the game until 6:52 to go in the third.

That was roughly 45 minutes to an hour in real time, a problem that was noticeable because backup point guard Travis Best strained his groin late in the second quarter and was not available for the second half.

Kidd was the Nets' only weapon at the end, scoring 10 of their final 12 points.

New Jersey made four baskets in the final 18:04. Kidd made them all.

Kidd said the decision to save him for the second half was not his. He also doesn't intend to beg team doctors for playing time.

"They know best at this point," he said.

He finished with 15 points, five rebounds, two assists and four turnovers in 21 minutes.

"I could tell myself I feel great, but

there is a bigger picture. Longevity is what I think about now, being around in April for next five years, to be able to play without pain."

Eric Williams, who scored 21 points, said it would be foolish to ask Kidd to play more now.

"He still has a long career ahead of him," Williams said. "We all want him to stay out there, and I'm pretty sure he wants to, too, but you have to be wise. Once he gets to the point where he can continue to play on a high level, that's when we look forward to him playing all the time."

Kidd hopes to increase his playing time after the New Year.

Whether he is still in New Jersey by then remains to be seen.

Kidd is still annoyed that the new Nets owners did not keep the three-time defending Atlantic Division champions together after last season.

All-Star power forward Kenyon Martin was sent to Denver in a sign-and-trade deal, and veteran Perry Kittles was shipped to the Clippers. Lucious Harris was released, and Rodney Rogers opted to sign with New Orleans.

If Kidd can continue to build his stamina, he might be one of the most sought-after players when the trading deadline approaches.



New Jersey guard Jason Kidd, who has played only five games since knee surgery in July, has been limited to 20 minutes a game since his return.

HOME TEAM

A WEEKLY LOOK AT LOCAL SPORTS

Griffin makes right moves

Branching out from football to basketball paying off for Patch senior

BY RUSTY BRYAN
Stars and Stripes

PVAIHINGEN, Germany
atch High School senior
Neal Griffin is an experi-
enced football player,
but he's convinced his
sports future lies in basketball.

It's a revelation that would
have surprised him a few years
ago.

"I grew up in Georgia playing
football," he said Monday. "Basket-
ball never even occurred to
me."

It has now.

Griffin, who began playing bas-
ketball as a seventh-grader at
Vilseck and spent his freshman
year on Heidelberg's bench,
moved to Patch as a sophomore
and made the All-Europe second
team as a junior. The
5-foot-10-inch senior speedster,
who averaged more than 18
points and three assists per game
last season, plans on bigger
things for this season and beyond.

"Last summer, I went to four
five-star camps in the States,"
said Griffin, who plays both
guard positions and small for-
ward for the Panthers.

Even though he was among the
shortest players at the sessions at

Hamilton College and Syracuse
University in New York, Griffin
said he felt he held his own.

"I was going against guards
who were 6-6," he said. "I did
pretty good. I made the all-star
team at every camp. I got letters
from Notre Dame and Holy
Cross."

Griffin, who said his dream is
to play for Florida A&M Univer-
sity, realizes his size is working
against him, but plans to have his
speed and shooting ability over-
come that.

"He's a streaky shooter," said
Mannheim coach John Crockett,
whose Bison defeated Patch
72-60 on Friday night despite 28
points by Griffin.

"When he's hot, there's very lit-
tle you can do to stop him."

Crockett also noticed the quick
part of Griffin's game.

"He penetrates well," Crockett
said. "He can stop and shoot."

Griffin used both aspects of his
game Saturday as Patch rebound-
ed to stop Ansbach 62-56. Griffin
scored 20 points to help Patch
rally from a 46-42 third-quarter
deficit in an echo of his perfor-
mance last year.

"When it looks like we have lost
the game, Neal can get it back for
us, almost by himself," Patch
coach Brian Tingey said. "He is
the reason we won a lot of games
when we were down — at the be-
ginning of the fourth quarter."

Ansbach coach Ted Marr
shared a more recent assessment.

"Russell [Bailey] had been to a
basketball camp with him in
Italy," Marr said. "He took me
aside before the game and said
'That guy really can play.' And he
really could."

Griffin credits his development
as a player to his move to Patch,
where there was playing time he
might not have gotten had he
stayed at Heidelberg and the op-
portunity to test himself against
players such as Mannheim grad
James Meeks, a two-time All-Eu-
ropean.

"Playing against Meeks really
made me a lot better," Griffin
said.

Especially in the area of team
play.

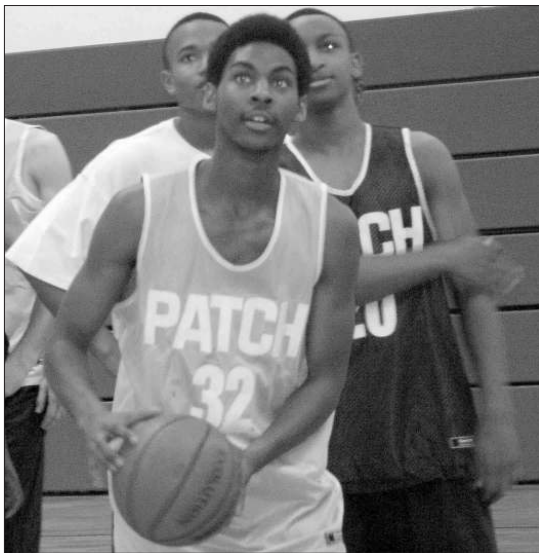
"He doesn't look to shoot first,"
Patch guard Gene Simpson said
of his teammate. "Sometimes
going down the floor you're
amazed at the things he can do."

Things that never would have
occurred to a Georgia football
player before he crossed the
ocean.

"If I had stayed in Georgia, I
never would have tried basket-
ball," Griffin said.

"Coming over here made me
try a new sport."

E-mail Rusty Bryan at:
bryan@mail.estripes.osd.mil



RUSTY BRYAN/Stars and Stripes

Patch High School senior Neal Griffin eyes the rim during shooting practice Monday in Vaihingen, Germany. "He's a streaky shooter," said Mannheim coach John Crockett, whose Bison defeated Patch 72-60 on Friday night despite 28 points by Griffin. "When he's hot, there's very little you can do to stop him."

Home team hiatus

Saturday's Wolfpack Classic Christmas Holiday Wrestling Tournament at Würzburg, Germany, is the final event of the calendar year for high school athletes, who resume their winter sports seasons after New Year's Day. The next Home Team page will appear Jan. 13.

Game of the week

What: Wolfpack Classic Christmas Holiday Wrestling Tournament
When: 9 a.m. Saturday. Matches will wrap up Sunday.

Where: Leighton Barracks gym, Würzburg, Germany
What's at stake: Individual titles in 13 weight classes. Second in importance only to February's European championships.

Admission: \$2 for adults, \$1 for students
Meet director Steve Kennedy expects as many as 200 high school and middle school wrestlers for the annual event, which draws competitors from across Europe.

"We have kids coming from Italy, England, Belgium and possibly even the Netherlands," as well as Germany, Kennedy said Tuesday. "All in all, it seems that the name of the Wolfpack Classic is still alive, thanks to Duane Werner."

Werner, the longtime Würzburg coach who founded this event, transferred control to Kennedy when he accepted an administrative job in the U.S. military system last fall. Instead of running the event, Werner is advising Kennedy this year, the new director said.

Under new management, the Wolfpack Classic should continue to be a highlight of the European tournament, to be held this February in Wiesbaden.

"This is a big event," Kennedy said. "It will allow wrestlers to see what they stand now and to see what moves they need to improve."

ATHLETES OF THE WEEK

Russell Bailey

Boys basketball
Ansbach

Last week: Bailey, a 6-foot-2-inch senior, played the pivotal role in Ansbach's 37-31 victory over visiting Heidelberg on Friday. The victory by Division III contender Ansbach over the five-time defending European Division I champion Lions ended Heidelberg's 20-game winning streak, which stretched back to the 2003 season.

Bailey, who is averaging 28.5 points per game after his team's first three games, scored 12 points and grabbed 12 rebounds against Heidelberg, but his value went far beyond that.

"We were behind 14-2 after the first quarter," Ansbach coach Ted Marr said Tuesday. "So we brought in a freshman center [Xavier Taylor] and moved Russell to point guard to control our game. It changed our whole offensive effort."

The move worked defensively, too, according to Marr, as the Cougars went on a 29-7 run the next two periods to put the game away.

"He does everything great for us," Marr said of his All-Europe first-team returnee. "Whatever we need him to do, he does it."

Selected by Stars and Stripes staff.

Nyesha Green

Girls basketball
Mannheim

Last week: Green, a sophomore shooting guard, scored 28 points to go with 12 rebounds, seven steals and four assists Friday as the Lady Bison won their Division II opener, a 54-37 verdict at Patch.

"Nyesha had one of those games a player will remember for the rest of her life," Mannheim coach Adrian Crawford said.

"The performance was a result of her hard work and dedication toward becoming a better basketball player."

Green came back to score 12 points on Saturday in a 35-18 victory over Heidelberg to run her scoring average for the season to 15.5 points. Her contributions all over the floor have helped Mannheim to a 3-1 record going into the winter break, with the only loss coming to defending European Division II champion Ansbach, 53-43. Green scored 16 points in that one as she and her teammates attempted to return to Division II prominence.

"We're coming along slowly but surely," Crawford said, "but we still have a long way to go."

Selected by Stars and Stripes staff.

Proposals prove counterproductive

NHL labor negotiations break down after players, owners reject offers

BY ROB GILLIES
The Associated Press

TORONTO — Ten years ago, the NHL and the players' association salvaged the season after a lockout wiped out half the campaign.

This time, it doesn't look as though they'll be able to save the 2004-05 season.

"I think it's a lot different this time around. I'm less optimistic this year," said Dallas forward Bill Guerin, a member of the union's bargaining committee.

The NHL moved a step closer to losing the season Tuesday when the league and players' association rejected proposals for a new collective bargaining agreement.

The second negotiating session in a week lasted 3½ hours. The league turned down the players' offer from last Thursday and presented a salary cap-based counterproposal for an hour. The union then held its own discussions for 2½ hours before rejecting the offer and ending the meeting that came on the 90th day of the lockout.

No new meetings have been scheduled, making it quite possible the NHL will become the first North American sports league to cancel a full season because of a labor dispute.

Canadian Prime Minister Paul Martin offered federal intervention on Tuesday, but both sides

have said in the past they don't want an outside mediator to get involved.

The major difference between the sides remains the salary-cap roadblock. The NHL wants a cap to achieve what it calls cost certainty. The players' association says it will never accept that.

There might be a month left to salvage the season, but the sides seem too far apart on the philosophical difference of a cap. The last NHL lockout ended with a deal on Jan. 11, 1995, allowing for a 48-game season.

This lockout has already forced the cancellation of 414 regular-season games and the 2005 All-Star Game.

Asked about the prospects of having a season, Ottawa forward Daniel Alfredsson said: "If they stand by their salary cap, the chances are none."

NHL Commissioner Gary Bettman acknowledged the league is after a cap.

"My hope is that the union leadership recognizes that the owners' resolve is great," Bettman said. "We only know of really one approach to meaningfully address and fix our problems. And unless somebody can miraculously come up with another approach, which I am highly skeptical of but always anxious to listen, we're committed to fixing this the right way."

The league proposal contained

a cap, which, based on last year's economics, would see team player payrolls range between a minimum of \$34.6 million and maximum of \$38.6 million. The Pittsburgh Penguins and Nashville Predators would have to increase their payrolls while the Toronto Maple Leafs and Detroit Red Wings would have to dramatically reduce theirs.

The NHL also revamped the players' association rollback offer by significantly reducing the salaries of the richest players and leaving the lowest paid untouched. Players making less than \$800,000 would not have their salary decreased. Those making \$5 million or more would have 35 percent taken away from their existing contracts.

Bettman said the offer made by the union last Thursday, which featured a 24-percent salary rollback, was a "big-time, significant and meaningful move" but was a short-term fix that wouldn't cure the league's financial troubles in the long run.

"In short, the league took what they liked from our proposal, made major changes and slapped a salary cap on top of it," union head Bob Goodenow said. "Put simply, our proposal provides the basis for a negotiated agreement. The NHL's does not."

The union's offer also contained a luxury tax, a revenue sharing plan, a lower cap on

entry-level contracts and bonuses, and a way for teams to take players to arbitration.

But because it doesn't guarantee what each team will pay its players, it doesn't meet the solution the owners are seeking.

"We have no interest in a luxury tax at any level at any threshold," Bettman said.



NHLPA chief Bob Goodenow said, "Put simply, our proposal provides the basis for a negotiated agreement. The NHL's does not."

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AN ARMY OF ONE

Current climate putting little heat on players, owners

The NHL is disappearing right before our eyes, and the reason is simple. Almost nobody has a dog in this fight.

You expect fans to lose interest whenever billionaires battle millionaires for a larger slice of the economic pie, but not to the extent being seen in the dogfight between the NHL and its players over a new collective bargaining agreement.

More than half the Americans polled by The Hockey News were surprised to learn the league hasn't even opened for business this season. That number is considerably lower north of the border, but even there — if you take much-traveled pro and amateur comedian Brett Hull at his word — fans are learning to make do without the NHL.

The Phoenix Coyotes star turned up on the "Weekend Up-

date" segment of "Saturday Night Live" and was asked, as a Canadian, what he thought about the recent landmark ruling by Canada's Supreme Court that gay marriage was constitutional.

"That's what happens in Canada when there's no hockey," Hull said. "Guys have more time to hang out, talk about their feelings, next thing you know they're in love with each other."

"I've got nothing against it," he

added, "but I'd rather be playing hockey."

Chances that Hull will get his wish anytime soon took a serious hit Tuesday. After months of avoiding each other like a rash, the second negotiating session between management and labor in a week lasted just 3½ hours. Commissioner Gary Bettman didn't find the words "salary cap" anywhere in the proposal from the players union, inserted them in a

counterproposal and handed it back an hour later. The players reacted to that addition pretty much the way they always have.

"Put simply," NHLPA chief Bob Goodenow said, "our proposal provides the basis for a negotiated agreement. The NHL's does not."

Afterward, both sides retreated to their corners and resumed praying for a bolt of lightning to strike the other.

When Bettman took the job as commissioner fresh off a stint as NBA boss — David Stern's right-hand man, few people took seriously his pledge to put hockey on equal footing with the other major team sports. And if the work stoppage he has forced on arenas out of control a little longer, Bettman will have surpassed major league baseball, the NFL and the NBA — just not in the way he, or anyone else, envisioned.

Pro hockey is on the verge of becoming the first North American sports league to cancel a full season because of a labor dispute.

By this point in previous negotiations, fans of the sport would have chosen sides, with the resulting public pressure forcing one or the other — or both — to make meaningful concessions. The only thing apathy has done, instead, is make both sides more cynical.

On its face, the players' latest move was impressive. It proposed to roll back salaries by 24 percent, throw in a luxury tax and revenue sharing, lower the cap on entry-level contracts and bonuses, and provide arbitration. Under it, third-line centers wouldn't be making \$9 million a year and the New Jersey Devils would have seen their payroll slashed from \$60 million to \$46 million.

"This is no grandstanding play," Goodenow said last week. "This is no P.R. move."

Yet that's exactly what it was. He knows that salaries consume more than 70 percent of revenues and more important, that Bettman wasn't about to consider an agreement that didn't fix the owners' costs at much closer to 50 percent.

The commissioner, on the other hand, hasn't wavered from the start. He acknowledged one more time that any savings from the players plan would be squandered by his owners, likely after a season and another round or two of free-agent bidding wars, and he's right.

The only way to short-circuit that process, as the NFL and NBA have learned at great expense, is with a salary cap. Baseball, though, staggers from one negotiation to the next without a cap in place, and that's the model Goodenow has in his sights.

"We believe that every team has a salary cap," he said. "It's called a budget."

Bettman and Goodenow have about a month to get realistic before the season is lost. But because neither side feels the fans at its back, there's no sense of urgency to make a decisive move.

Jim Litke is a national sports columnist for The Associated Press. Write to him at: jlitke@ap.org.

Jim Litke



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SPORTS



Reports say Cardinals lose out to Boston in bid to retain All-Star SS Renteria, Page 50

Fading into a purple haze

Late swoon puts Vikings at risk of missing playoffs

BY DAVE CAMPBELL
The Associated Press

EDEN PRAIRIE, Minn. — The Minnesota Vikings were convinced they wouldn't end this season like they did the last, when a 6-0 start was wiped out by a 3-7 finish.

Well, they could be right. This season might be worse.

Fresh off their fifth loss in seven games, the Vikings are 7-6 and coach Mike Tice's future is in question. For Minnesota's tortured football fans, these circumstances are hauntingly familiar. This franchise can surely compete with anyone in the disappointment department.

"Right now things don't look very cheerful," said Tice, who spent much of his Monday playing Dr. Phil to those needing therapy after a 27-23 home defeat to struggling Seattle.

"You want all your goals to come out exactly as you planned ... not many times does it come out exactly the way you dreamed about."

Over their 44-year history, the Vikings have been one of the NFL's most consistent winners — but something always keeps them from greatness. As people who root for the rival Green Bay Packers love to point out, Minnesota was beaten in all four Super Bowl appearances — the last coming after the 1976 season.



Linebackers E.J. Henderson, left, Chris Claiborne, center, and Keith Newman, right, watch the Vikings fall apart Sunday.



Minnesota Vikings quarterback Daunte Culpepper, left, is brought down by Seattle Seahawks defensive end Antonio Cochran, right, on the last play of the Seahawks 27-23 victory Sunday in Minneapolis, the Vikings' fifth loss in seven games.

Coach Dennis Green won 100 games in 10 years, but his teams frequently choked in the playoffs. The most memorable, or cringe-inducing, of those disasters came in the NFC championship game following the 1998 season. The team that went 15-1 and set the league's all-time scoring record blew a late lead and lost in overtime at home to the Atlanta Falcons.

Two years later, the Vikings dropped their final three regular-season games to lose the NFC's top seed and were embarrassingly eliminated by New York in the conference title game at Giants Stadium, 41-0.

Tice's rebuilding project seemed to hit stride last year with six straight wins to open the season, but then came a brutal stretch in which Minnesota lost to all four teams that finished 4-12. The last one, to Arizona on the game's final play, stung the most — and left the Vikings out of the playoffs for a third consecutive year.

Owner Red McCombs, in town for the organization's annual Christmas party, was reminded Monday of a somber plane ride back to San Antonio with his family after that devastating defeat to the Cardinals.

McCombs asked his grandson, Joseph, if his friends would be teasing him the next day in school because the Vikings lost. He said they would, and McCombs asked him how he usually handles it.

"Well, you know, it's not the first time," the 13-year-old replied.

Nope, it certainly isn't.

Despite a 5-1 start in a soft NFC that suggested a chance for January success, the Metrodome — perennially one of the most difficult places for opponents to play — hasn't been as loud this season.

Especially in situations, like a critical third down for the defense in a tight game or a long touchdown reception by Randy Moss, that normally require earplugs or threaten long-term hearing ability.

It's almost as if these scarred patrons are simply expecting something bad to happen and can't conjure enough energy to lift their voices to the usual high level.

Tice, the league's lowest-paid coach, has managed to maintain his optimism despite the uncertainty. McCombs must decide by Jan. 1 whether to pick up a \$1 million option on the coach's contract for 2005, and inaction would give Tice the freedom to pursue other jobs on Jan. 31.

McCombs has said repeatedly he'll deal with it after the season, but the Vikings' final regular-season game is the day after the deadline and their playoff fate probably won't be decided by then.

If Minnesota doesn't qualify for the postseason, it's hard to imagine Tice coming back. But McCombs reiterated his support this week.

SEE HAZE ON PAGE 48

Source:
USC brings
former
Utah coach
Majerus
out of
retirement

Page 52



Fueled Lakers
rolled in Seattle

Page 51



Duckett
undergoes
surgery
now so
he'll be
ready for
playoffs

Page 48

D.C. baseball on
shaky ground
after city council
votes on deal

Page 50

